

THE COSMOCENTRIC MODEL OF PASTORAL PSYCHOTHERAPY:
A CONTEXTUALIZED HOLISTIC MODEL FROM A BANTU
AFRICAN WORLDVIEW, A PERSPECTIVE FOR
POST-MODERN PASTORAL PSYCHOTHERAPY

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by
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Abstract

The Cosmocentric Model of Pastoral Psychotherapy:

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Peter Mwit Rukungah

This dissertation addresses a moral and theological problem posed by anthropocentrism which presupposes that humans are the only created beings in the universe with intrinsic value. That view has emerged from or has been facilitated by the views of classic and modern Western science, Greek philosophy, Western individualistic psychology, Western Christianity, Biblical theology, and early research on the anthropology of religion where anthropocentrism is held as the base of all interactions in the universe. Here humans alone are seen as the final aim. Anthropocentrism has not only robbed the panstructured universe the richness of the ecological dimensions of life in the universe but has also informed the prevalent Western models of psychotherapy where individual autonomy is venerated as a goal of psychotherapy as opposed to communal interdependence.

This dissertation offers an alternative paradigm of pastoral psychotherapy that views the cosmos as the center of therapeutic interaction. This new proposed model is referred to as the cosmocentric model of pastoral

psychotherapy. The model is grounded in the Bantu worldview which offers a paradigm where therapy is carried out not exclusively in reference to the individual's internal frame of reference, but in reference to the ecological community. The Bantu people view reality as a continuous process of unfolding, thus overcoming the ideas of a static, fragmentary and individualistic existence as advocated by the modern worldview. For the Bantus, the universe is a connected unfolding reality centered on the cosmos which is populated with beings. The Bantus offer a holistic view of the universe where all beings are restored to a harmonious relationship with each other. This view also offers an exit from the anthropocentric conception of the universe by giving the world a new way of seeing reality.

Therefore the thesis of this dissertation is that a Bantu African worldview provides a sound therapeutic paradigm for a cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy for post-modern psychotherapy. It envisions and offers a therapeutic hope for the future of psychotherapy.

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Introduction

This dissertation addresses a moral and a theological problem posed by theological anthropocentrism, which presupposes that humans are the only created beings with intrinsic value in the universe. Such a modern worldview is reflected in the early researches on the anthropology of religion, Greek philosophy, classical modern science, and many traditional Christian theologies.

The task of this dissertation is basically one. It puts forth a paradigm of pastoral psychotherapy which is contextualized and holistic,¹ so that it will function well among the Bantu African people.² This contextualized and holistic model offers a new paradigm of pastoral psychotherapy for the post-modern world where therapy will

¹ Chris R. Schlauch describes pastoral psychotherapy in such a way that it goes beyond descriptive attributes to the activity itself. He feels that pastoral psychotherapy should not be defined by using descriptive attributes, but rather by using the activity itself. Here we will use his definition and go beyond it. Pastoral psychotherapy, from a Bantu perspective, is the activity in which a pastoral psychotherapist observes, understands and interprets the social, cultural, psychological, religious, and moral dimensions of the ongoing therapeutic process through psycho-communal frames of reference. See Chris R. Schlauch, "What is Pastoral Psychotherapy," Journal of Pastoral Care 39, no. 3 (Sept. 1985): 219-21.

² According to one source, the term Bantu was a term coined by a Dr. Bleek, a missionary, referring to a group of people across Africa whose philosophical, religious and ontological existence is expressed by the use of the suffix NTU or TU or DU which stands for being. See John T. Brown, Among the Bantu Nomads: A Record of Forty Years Spent Among the Bechuana (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1926), 17.

be carried out with reference to the eco-community and not exclusively with reference to individuals.³ This task will be examined in the light of a Bantu African worldview, which offers a grounding for this inquiry.

This dissertation explores the early research on African religion, focusing on what early anthropologists classified as "animistic primitive religion." Our concern here, however, is to revalue this category and further describe the role of African religion in the life of the Bantu community.

The question of "individual" integration, and the place that one holds in the African universe, has been investigated by early scholars whose work deserves our acknowledgement as a step toward understanding African religion, even though their contribution left much to be desired. The early work was spearheaded by Edward Burnette Tylor. According to one theologian, Tylor's book Primitive Culture became very popular among his disciples.⁴

³ Eco-community (Mwiriga) is a new term that has been coined for the purpose of this dissertation. The prefix "eco" is derived from the Greek term oikos which means house. In this respect, the term "eco-community" refers to a community of beings who ontologically belong to the same household vis-a-vis cosmos. The concept emerges from the Bantu conception of what constitutes a community which includes both humankind and other beings in the universe. See also the definition of oikes in John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 76.

⁴ See John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy (New York: Praeger, 1969), 7.

Tylor's approach gave impetus to later hierarchical theories of religious evolution. He was followed by Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Paul Radin, Bronislaw Malinowski, Robert Bellah, and Joseph Kitagawa. Most of these early approaches to religious evolution classified African religion as less developed and hence at the bottom of the religious evolutionary list, where other religions such as Christianity and Islam were put close to, or at, the top of the list. Terms like animism,⁵ dynamism, totemism, naturism, and fetishism were employed to describe the African religious universe, without an understanding of the positive and holistic aspects. A major value of African religion is its cosmic centeredness, which is distinct from the European anthropocentric emphasis. This dissertation explores the cosmic-centered aspect of African religion as an important contributor to identity formation and the wellness of all beings in the universe.

⁵ There is a difference between the animistic worldview and the modern worldview. Even though it was a misconception for the early scholars to describe African religions as only animistic, the animistic conception of reality is part of the religious experience of the African people.

Early scholars, having come from the mechanistic worldview of the eighteenth century, had fully taken anti-animistic attitudes by rejecting Aristotelian animism which has its base in the paradigm of organism. In rejecting animistic monism, early scholars upheld the modern worldview, its mechanistic attitude, and emphasized supernatural dualism. This supernaturally dualistic view emptied the world of spiritual beings and magnified a supernatural deity who was completely detached from the world. This is a foreign concept for the Bantu.

In spite of the earlier approaches that led to misinterpretations of the African universe, contemporary scholars have opened a new chapter of understanding, a chapter that values a holistic worldview, as opposed to the modern dualistic view. The contemporary approaches include the views of African scholars, spearheaded by works of Placide Tempels, B. K. Taylor, Alexander Kagame, John Mbiti, Vincent Mulago, Edward Geoffrey Parrinder, E. Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey G. Leinhardt, E. Idowu, and Victor Turner.

All of the above scholars have contributed to the contemporary study of African worldview and the place of humanity in it. In the African universe, humanity is not seen as the center but as a co-participant with other created beings in the universe, where one can only say, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."⁶

Paul Tillich, John Cobb, David Griffin, Marjorie Suchocki, and Michael Stark's work are also examined in this research, because they have all observed that anthropocentrism championed by the modern worldview appears to be responsible for major problems that confront the world today.

Paul Tillich is particularly concerned with the early development of anthropocentrism in Christian theology, as well as the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century's

⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 108.

scientific and Christian communities. Tillich did see a preeminent position of humanity in the universe, but "not as an outstanding object among other objects."⁷ On the question of the communal connectedness of beings in the universe, Tillich's idea captures the Bantu notion: "No individual exists without participation," he argues, "and no personal being exists without communal being."⁸

On the question of the intrinsic value of human life, Cobb very strongly argues that humanity has no monopoly on intrinsic value. He calls for a balance between humanity's intrinsic value and the intrinsic value of other beings: "We must learn to balance our human value against the intrinsic value of others rather than to judge the others as only instrumental to us."⁹

Griffin convincingly argues that the problem of anthropocentrism faced in the Western world is caused by the modern worldview.¹⁰ This term Western is used in this dissertation to refer to Euro-American therapeutic methodologies represented by the psychoanalysis of Freud,

⁷ Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 165.

⁸ Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1:176.

⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr., "Beyond Anthropocentrism in Ethics and Religion," in On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics, eds. Richard Knowles Morris and Michael W. Fox (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1978), 145.

¹⁰ David Griffin, God and Religion in the Postmodern World: Essays in Post-modern Theology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 13.

the humanistic therapy of Carl Rogers and the behavioristic therapy of B. F. Skinner. This legacy of Western psychology has left in the African scene a body of psychological tools which continue to distort our understanding of the African personality. We still use these psychological tools blindly to define our reality, yet using methods derived from those psychological tools has resulted in an inadequate understanding of African peoples, leading to inappropriate diagnoses and treatment. New holistic methodologies have emerged that challenge the above mentioned models (see pages 220-23).

This conception of the universe, where persons experience themselves as the center of the universe, creates feelings of self-centeredness, which all five scholars find to be a major contributing factor leading to egocentricity,¹¹ isolation, loneliness, meaninglessness, anxiety, despair, ecological crisis, and economic and social injustice.

What is needed now is a new worldview that will account for both the human and non-human worlds, and reflect the

¹¹ "Egocentricity" is used in Michael J. Stark's usage of the word. For Stark, "egocentricity seeks to establish and guard a sense of unique identity and importance in a way that requires continued judgment and evaluation of the self in opposition to others and the world." Michael J. Stark, "Egocentricity, Coenocentrism, and the Nature of Human Fulfillment," Journal of Pastoral Psychology 17, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1982): 30. The feeling of egocentricity comes from a sense of deficiency in being, and as a result seeks satiation through confirmation and assurance.

reality of inter-connectedness in the cosmos. Howard Clinebell, within pastoral counseling, also calls for a new worldview in Western society:

A new world view that makes a place for a reality that goes beyond the limited "reality" of materialism is desperately needed and seems to be emerging gradually in our times.¹²

Similarly, Thomas Oden sees that the future task of pastoral counseling will be a constant attempt to go beyond Freud. This will open a new way of re-envisioning post-modern pastoral care and counseling. "The task that lies ahead is the development of a post-modern, post-Freudian, neo-classical approach to Christian Pastoral Care which has taken seriously the resources of modernity...."¹³

These two calls are significant because Sigmund Freud's view of reality, and those who have later built on his thought, borrowed much from the modern worldview championed by modern science. William S. Schmidt has commented on the problem posed by the modern worldview and the place of beings in the universe:

The majority of 20th century theories of personality, whether behavioristic, psychoanalytic, or humanistic, all borrowed heavily from this worldview of classical science.

¹² Howard Clinebell, Growth Counseling: Hope-Centered Methods of Actualizing Wholeness (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 115-16.

¹³ Thomas C. Oden, "Recovering Lost Identity," Journal of Pastoral Care, 34 (1980):15.

That is, if the universe operated in mechanistically observable fashion, so too must the human organism.¹⁴

The table below is this writer's attempt to show the deficiencies of Western individualistic models of psychotherapy. The table is based on this writer's readings.

¹⁴ William S. Schmidt, "Toward a Cosmological Foundation for Pastoral Care," Journal of Pastoral Care 37 (1983): 208.

TABLE 1

MAJOR WESTERN INDIVIDUALISTIC THERAPEUTIC MODELS AND THEIR DEFECTS

Therapeutic Models	Key Persons	Emphasis	Driving Force	Therapeutic Goal	World View	Defect of the Model
PSYCHOANALYTIC (Individual centered)	Sigmund Freud	Personal aspect of experiences. Analysis.	All human behavior is controlled by libido. Intrapsychic.	Maximum pleasure.	Cause and effect. (One way causation) Anthropocentric.	Hyper-individualistic. Social and Physical experience is lost. The world is external and accidental. Individual behavior is determined by libido. Dualistic. Deterministic. Reductionistic. Mechanistic. Pathogenetic. Lack of spirituality. Cosmic Experience is lost.
BEHAVIORISTIC (Social and Environment Centered)	B. F. Skinner	Social and physical aspects of experiences.	All human behavior is controlled by social and physical environment.	Study of social and physical environment is key to behavior modification.	Cause and effect. (One way causation) Anthropocentric.	Individualistic. Personal experience is lost. Deterministic. Reductionistic. Mechanistic. Dualistic. Egocentric. Lack of spirituality. Behavior is determined by social and physical environment. Cosmic experience is lost.
HUMANISTIC (Individual Centered)	C. Rogers	Self. Self-discovery.	Internal self.	Self-differentiation. Self-actualization Personal freedom. Self Uniqueness. Transcend the past developments. Self Mastery. Self discovery.	Cause and effect. (One way causation) Anthropocentric.	Individualistic. Egocentric. Anthropocentric. Dualistic. Competition. Success Syndrome. Deterministic. Reductionistic. Mechanistic. Lack of spirituality. Cosmic experience is lost.

In this dissertation, I propose a new perspective for viewing the world, and for doing therapy where the whole cosmos becomes the center and subject of liberation and a restoration to wellness. This new perspective is referred to as cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy. This dissertation attempts to recapture Bantu cultural richness as a therapeutic resource for the enhancement of the well-being of all beings in the cosmos. The Bantu universe is populated with beings (NTU) who maintain an ontological harmonious relationship with other beings for holistic living. In this respect, NTU is seen as the cosmic universal life force that is immanent in all that is in the universe. Without NTU, there would not be any existence in the universe. The NTU concept is fully developed in chapter two where anthropocentrism is viewed as an abstraction to the eco-system. The anthropocentric view of the universe poses an ethical and moral problem for us because it does not adequately account for the non-human world. This discrepancy has led to, and is reflected in, the global ecological crisis. The development of modern technology in the name of progress and civilization has disrupted the cosmic equilibrium in the global eco-system. Even with the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the effects of waste products continue to threaten the survival of future generations. The effect of pollution in the atmosphere remains a constant threat for future life in the universe.

The annual combustion of fossil fuels, which releases five billion tons of carbon monoxide into the atmosphere per year, is estimated to be one ton per person in the world. The enormous increases of pollutants in the air and in the soil, along with deforestation threatens the ecological balance of the universe.¹⁵

The major problem confronting the global ecology is anthropocentrism, which regards the human as the final aim of the universe and, hence, the apex of creation. This notion of human beings enhances the exploitation of the natural universe and is therefore problematic for the Bantu people.

This dissertation opens a new chapter for understanding both the non-human and human worlds as the basic subject of God's redemption and restoration. John Collins says:

Human salvation cannot be divorced from our understanding of the world around us. The creation, too, is groaning in travail. Our total view of the world will no doubt be always symbolic in character and be a reflection of the values we wish to affirm. It is important, however, that we find a way to integrate our human values with some cosmological understanding if our theology is to represent more than a fragment of our experience.¹⁶

This dissertation, therefore, offers a incarnational

¹⁵ Lester R. Brown and P. Sandra, "Threshold of Change," in State of the World, 1987, ed. Linda Starke (New York: Norton, 1987), 14.

¹⁶ John Collins, "New Testament Cosmology," in Cosmology and Theology, eds. David Tracy and Nicholas Lash, English language ed. Marcus Lefebure (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 7.

therapeutic hope for both the non-human world and human world by offering a method of pastoral psychotherapy that accounts for all God's creation.

The thesis of this dissertation is that a Bantu African worldview provides a sound therapeutic paradigm for the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy for the post-modern world. This model offers an exit from anthropocentric conceptions of the universe, by envisioning a unified view of the universe, where all beings are restored to live in a harmonious relationship with other beings in the interconnected universe. This vision rejects anthropocentrism, since humanity, in the cosmocentric view, is seen as only one of the beings in the cosmos among other beings. The cosmos as an ordered system becomes the center of the universe. A Bantu African worldview provides the basis for this endeavor.

The implication of the cosmocentric model is cosmic wholeness-coenocentricity as an ethical, theological and therapeutic necessity¹⁷; a new vision that could be called

¹⁷ Stark says that coenocentricity is the opposite of egocentricity. It includes an awareness of inner commonality and relatedness of all beings. Coenocentricity curtails the discomfort that comes from the quest to prove "being" and "value" since being and value are given with existence itself per se. See Stark, 29. Stark says "coenocentrism makes life holy, it reduces egocentric perturbances, promotes tranquility and relaxation and hastens a cherishing of life for its own sake without ulterior motives. Coenocentrism obliterates the sense of isolation, separateness and difference from others and it reduces destructive [toxic] competitiveness since it grants the worth of all individuals [beings] irrespective of

post-modern.¹⁸

The cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy, which is grounded in the Bantu worldview, calls for a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric to a cosmocentric focus in pastoral psychotherapy. This is a necessity because Bantu thinking conceives of the universe as an interconnection at all levels which is centered on the cosmos. The existence of single separate selves or egos in creation that are detached from the ecological web of existence has no future because all reality is intercosmic. In this respect separate autonomous selves cannot be the final goal of psychotherapy

idiosyncratic variations in their beliefs or behaviors." See p. 29. "The coenocentric perspective also softens the subject/object dichotomy...." See Stark, 35.

¹⁸ Post-modernism is a view and understanding of the world as a created organism of interactions. Post-modernism affirms that there is an ontological interrelatedness of being in the universe and that there is intrinsic worth of all the beings in the universe. In the post-modern vision, there is an emphasis between the worldview and the type of persons (muntu) we become. At a deeper level, post-modernism captures the Bantu worldview, for they both call for radical empiricism which takes the whole reality as whole. Post-modernism also captures the Bantu vision of ethics, where cosmology becomes the detriment of the Bantu ethical principles. As Griffin affirms, it is "that our cosmology, our worldview, inevitably determines our ethics, our way of life." See David Griffin, "Peace and the Postmodern Paradigm," in Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions, ed. David Ray Griffin (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 144. In short, we can say that post-modernism is the Western world's attempt to overcome the distorted view of reality as propagated by modernism. It is an attempt to recapture a truthful understanding of reality, which is opposed to the individualistic mechanical and deterministic understanding as advocated by the modern worldview.

among the Bantu, not even among future generations.¹⁹

Moreover, development of contemporary physics has opened a new chapter of understanding the interconnected universe--not as a collection of physical objects, but a universe of interconnected and interrelated systems within a unified whole. This new vision of the universe has been envisioned by David Bohm in his book Wholeness and the Implicate Order.²⁰ Also a similar understanding of an interconnected universe has been envisioned by women in the feminist movement, who strongly oppose individualistic, dualistic, mechanistic and deterministic ways of seeing reality.

This dissertation follows Paul Tillich's correlation

¹⁹ The etymological meaning of psychotherapy reflects a deep religious tradition. It comes from the Greek psyche (or the Hebrew nephesh) which means "soul." The term therapy itself is derived from a Greek term, therapon, which was a name given to the one who served gods in healing; therefore, the term psychotherapy has a rich religious etymological history. It was first used in 1803 by J. C. Reil, and later by Daniel Hogan, before it became a popular term. The terms psyche and theurapeuo are both found in the New Testament. Psyche, in New Testament usage, means whole life in its totality, while therapeuo expresses an activity that brings holistic, ultimate healing. See Orlo S. Strunk, Jr., "Psychotherapy," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 1022.

However, over the years, the religious meaning of the terms psyche and theurapeuo slipped away from the minds of mental health delivery professionals. The reason for this could be attributed to the rise of secularism. The use of the term psychotherapy in this dissertation is a deliberate attempt to reclaim this religious meaning, since among the Bantu there is no dichotomy between sacred and profane.

²⁰ David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1980).

method as reformulated in David Tracy's and Don Browning's revised correlation methods. Tillichian correlational method attempts to correlate questions with answers from Christian revelation. It correlates questions from one pole with answers from the other pole. Here there is one way movement, whereas, the revised correlation method attempts to correlate both questions with answers emerging from human existence. In the revised correlation method, God and humans are both engaged in asking questions and at the same time giving answers to the questions they ask. This is a two-way movement. Moreover, the revised correlation method of Tracy and Browning attempts to portray a unified interrelated universe where questions and insights move two ways, between theology and existence. The method critically correlates both questions with answers that come from various experiences and interpretations of existence (such as the Bantu worldview), with various interpretations of existence conveyed in Christian revelation.²¹

Particular attention is given to the works of Arnold Van Gennep and Erik Erikson in their anthropological and psychosocial approaches to human life. These sources are brought into a dialogue with Bantu conceptions of the universe, life in the community, and personality formation.

²¹ See Don S. Browning, introduction to Practical Theology, ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 6. See also Davis Tracy, "The Foundations of Practical Theology," in Practical Theology, ed. Don Browning, 63.

In addition to library research, field research has been conducted in some East African communities which gives this dissertation a communal grounding. Those interviewed were selected on the basis of their abilities to relate the past to the present. This is possible because they share knowledge of both pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa. They have also witnessed the social changes from the past to the present Africa. The list of those who participated in the oral field interviews and the questionnaires used are both provided in the appendix. The intention is to relate the dissertation with living symbols, terms and stories that are currently used to express the relationship between humanity and the universe. In addition, the field research has been helpful in discerning current approaches to traditional therapy in East Africa.

This dissertation addresses and limits itself to the following broad areas of inquiry: the Bantu African worldview, theological and ethical themes of creation, redemption, God, community, selfhood, world, and pastoral care and counseling.

The first chapter deals with the development of anthropocentrism as a problem. It focuses on philosophical, Biblical, Christian, and psychological developments. The second chapter discusses the dimension of the Bantu universe. This chapter shows how the Bantu universe is a cosmic-centered universe as opposed to an anthropo-centered

universe as depicted in modernity.²²

The third chapter explores the dimension of the Bantu ecological community and their importance in holding the community together as a therapeutic resource that contributes to the well-being of all beings in the universe. The fourth chapter explores the significance of rituals and their therapeutic effects in personality formation and communal integration of the self with the ecological community.

The fifth chapter discusses and explores the distinctive methodological difference between the cosmocentric and individual-centered models of psychotherapy with a view to pointing out how the former is in tune with the Bantu cultural context. The sixth chapter explores the Bantu dimensions of diagnosis and treatment in the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy. The concept of what constitutes illness and well-being is depicted to determine the diagnosis and treatment. The goal of the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy is cosmic wholeness--coenocentricity--where all beings in the universe are restored to a harmonious relationship with other beings in the eco-community.

²² Modernism is a view and understanding of the world, which is depicted as a mechanistic self-centered universe, where humans become semi-gods and manipulate the universe in order to serve their personal interests. This view emerges from the modern worldview as reflected in Cartesian and Newtonian cosmology and is in contrast to the Bantu worldview.

Chapter 1

The Development of Anthropocentrism as a Problem The Philosophical and Scientific Development of Anthropocentrism

For more than 2,500 years, Western philosophy has been discussing the nature of animals and their place in the universe in relation to humans.¹ At the beginning of Greek philosophy some philosophers, such as Pythagoras and Plato, held the view that animals have identifiable characteristics and likened them to humans. This understanding, over the years, created a consciousness of the ethical responsibility of humans toward non-human creatures. Much later, thinkers such as Descartes and Newton held an opposite view, by believing that animals were just mere machines and hence humanity had no ethical responsibility toward these creatures.

For the last three centuries there has been an unresolved philosophical, religious, scientific and psychological tension regarding the nature of the relationship between humanity and other creatures in the universe. It is unfortunate that humanity has taken advantage of this unresolved tension to dominate other creatures, hence taking the central position in the

¹ Robert S. Brumbaugh, "Of Man, Animal and Morals: A Brief History," in On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics, eds. Richard Knowles Morris and Michael W. Fox (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1978), 6.

universe. This centrality of humanity is what has been referred to as anthropocentrism.² This part of the dissertation looks into the philosophical and scientific development of anthropocentrism as a problem.

According to Rene Descartes' Discourse on Method, the ability of humans to use language proved for him "a qualitative difference so great that we can be assured that human beings have immortal souls, whereas all other animals are only machines."³ In order for Descartes to make the distinction between nature and humanity, it became important for him to disprove analogies that might imply that animals have an intelligence like human beings. It was also important for him to deny that our behavior is capable of explanation without reference to intelligence.

Although the deaf and dumb are deprived just as much as--or more than--animals of the organs which aid others in speaking, they are in the habit of inventing for themselves various signs through which they make themselves understood to those who are usually with them and have the leisure to learn their language. And this attests not merely to the fact that animals have less reason than men [humans] but that they have none at all.⁴

Immanuel Kant, in line with Descartes, also believed that animals were mere machines and that humanity had no ethical

² Brumbaugh, 6.

³ Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980).

⁴ Descartes, 31.

responsibility to animals.⁵ Kant held that only rational beings have rights and that all other "irrational beings" have no rights of their own since they lack the power of rationality. This ethic lead him to regard humankind as an end, while other irrational beings were simply a means to an end. "But so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. The end is man."⁶

The modern worldview was developed and propagated by Descartes' and Newton's deterministic views of the universe. They both rejected all non-observable entities, believing that mind and body were split, with God relating to the mind only. This dualistic, mechanistic and deterministic view of the universe was picked up by Freud in his development of psychoanalysis. As Schmidt argues, Freud's view of reality, and those who later built on his thought, borrowed much from modern classical science:

Subsequently, the Cartesian dualism of Descartes rejected all non-observable entities. Mind and matter were split, with God and consciousness also separated from the later.

Newton intensified this mechanistic determinism with his conclusion that the universe consisted of moving matter which functioned according to rigid and unbreakable laws. Thus a mechanical cosmology was imposed upon the universe which over the centuries has become entrenched as the view of reality. The majority of 20th century theories of personality, whether behavioristic,

⁵ Immanuel Kant, Lectures on Ethics, trans. Louis Infield ((Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), 239.

⁶ Kant, 239.

psychoanalytic, or humanistic, all borrowed heavily from this worldview of [modern] classical science. That is, if the universe operated in mechanically observable fashion, so too must the human organism.⁷

This Cartesian and Newtonian mechanistic model became the steering wheel of the Western scientific and industrial revolution. It became a prototype, and was emulated by other disciplines which consciously modeled their theories in accordance to Cartesian and Newtonian cosmology.

The Freudian psychological theory, in particular, depicts the Cartesian and Newtonian cosmology. Freud introduced the metaphors of Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanics into his psychological theory in the formulation of psychoanalysis. Stanislav Grof states that "materialistic psychology explains mental processes as reactions of the organism to the environment and/or recombinations of previous sensory input stored in the brain in the form of engrams."⁸ Furthermore, Freud's instinctivistic and biological reductionism pushed him to develop a mechanistic psychological theory that portrayed human beings as machines reflecting Newtonian cosmology. Freud introduced deterministic psychology in his psychological model. On the one hand, Freud portrayed the "ego" as a puny being caught up between powerful instinctual

⁷ Schmidt, 208.

⁸ Stanislav Grof, "East and West: Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science," Journal of Transpersonal Psychology 15, no. 1 (1983): 20.

drives and "id" impulses. On the other hand, he portrayed the "super ego" as caught up between "id" impulses and the internalized demands of society.

Newtonian-Cartesian cosmology depicts a universe that distorts the reality of things. The image of humankind in the universe has been distorted by depicting humankind as a biological machine, driven by instinctual impulses. This view of humankind endorses a competitive spirit in human minds as reflected in Darwinism: a spirit of the "survival of the fittest."⁹

Freud's individualistic, intra-psychic, anthropocentric conception of personality is built on this individualistic, mechanistic and deterministic view of the universe. His notion of the "pleasure principle," the "constancy principle," the "intra-psychic conflict," "instinct," and "psychic energy" all operate according to the laws of modern classical science. The psychoanalysis of Freud places the emphasis on the ego aspect of personality so that all individual experiences have biological and psychological internal causes driven by the libido drives. This theoretical formulation does not give adequate explanation as to how the individual is both intercosmic and relational and as to how cosmic and relational ties influence one

⁹ Grof, 21.

another in a mutual causation.¹⁰

Now however, there is the new vision of post-modernism. The cosmologies of post-modern physics and process theology are close to Bantu cosmology. The development of twentieth-century physics has challenged Newtonian-Cartesian cosmology. Fritjof Capra has questioned the cosmology of modern classical science as reflected in the Newtonian-Cartesian model. For Capra, the objective world cannot be isolated or separated from the observer, but the observer is a participant in the eco-systemic order. The universe is not viewed as the gigantic mechanical clockwork of Newtonian cosmology, but is viewed instead as a unified web of intercosmic relations.¹¹ This new vision of the universe is reflected by David Bohm in his development of the holonomic theory of the universe. In his theory, Bohm describes the phenomenal world that we experience, as one aspect of reality; the explicate is the phenomenal world or unfolded order; there is also another reality that he calls the implicate or enfolded order. Implicate reality exists on another level of reality. The implicate is impossible to be observed directly except in episodes of a non-ordinary

¹⁰ James N. Poling, A Theological Integration of the Social and Personal in Pastoral Care and Counseling: A Process View, Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, California, 1980 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1980).

¹¹ Fritjof Capra, The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture (New York: Bantam Books, 1983), 22.

state of being.¹² Bohm's view of reality relates to the Bantu view of reality. Bantus see reality stretching even beyond the phenomenal world.

Carl Jung also became aware of the problem of Freud's individualistic and deterministic psychology. Unlike Freud, who saw psychological phenomena as a derivative of base instincts (libido) and a function of biology, Jung's psychology stresses generalized instinctual (libido) energy. Jung also stresses a transpersonal dimension that transcends the boundaries of individualism to the spiritual realms of reality in the universe. Jung's psychology moves beyond individualism and captures the cosmic dimensions of the psyche. Jung's ability to transcend Newtonian mechanistic thought is one among a multitude of contributory factors that cost him his friendship with Freud. Jung's contribution moves much closer to the Bantu worldview.

The Biblical Development of Anthropocentrism

In the Genesis creation stories Adam is depicted as created in God's image and likeness, and is also exalted as the crown of creation, having dominion over the created order. This view of humankind has been used as the basis on which humanity has been pushed into the center of the universe. Because the Genesis accounts of creation have been used to justify anthropocentrism, I will examine them carefully. The issue of anthropocentrism is not directly

¹² Bohm, 177.

spoken to in the Bible. Nevertheless, the story of creation tends to imply anthropocentrism in the way in which it tries to emphasize the separateness and uniqueness of humanity over other creation. Humankind is the only being, portrayed as having been created in the image of God, and given a dominion over other created beings (Gen. 1:26-31). These two aspects of human uniqueness are attributed to the divine prerogative. The notion of being created in the image of God puts humankind at a state of honor above all other beings in creation.¹³

This Biblically centralized view of humankind in the creation has been the corner stone which has given humankind an impetus to justify domination of creation. As Cobb writes: "Being in the image of God, it is argued, human life is of unlimited intrinsic value. Given over to human rule, all other life is merely instrumental to human ends."¹⁴

This human centrality was later magnified by Descartes, who made a distinction between physical substance, and the mental realm, and attributed the latter to humankind. For Descartes, all other created beings are viewed as complex machines,¹⁵ whose importance was instrumental in nature. Consequently the doctrine of Imago Dei has been a driving

¹³ John B. Cobb, Jr., Matters of Life and Death (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 20.

¹⁴ Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 20.

¹⁵ Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 21.

force, used to support anthropocentrism. Throughout Christendom, there has been little resistance against this anthropocentric emphasis. Even though in traditional Christian theology we see a theological trend that had supported anthropocentrism, there has been a new theological wave that has objected to this doctrine of human centrality. Cobb captures this new theological wave of thinking.

Although this biblical story certainly does single out human beings as those with whom God is peculiarly concerned, the Christian habit of accenting only this one point reflects more an arrogance that is not commended in the Bible than a balanced reading of the story. To take an analogous instance from the teaching of Jesus, that a human life is "of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:31) does not warrant the conclusion that sparrows are worth nothing at all. Indeed, it presupposes the opposite. The heavenly Father cares even for the sparrow; how much more for human beings.¹⁶

The Biblical notion of humanity's dominion over the rest of creation should not be taken as a justification for the metaphysical separation of humans from the rest of creation. This notion of dominion has a participatory concept in it, namely, that as God cares for creation, we too should participate with God in God's caring activity to restore well-being. "God sees that the created order is good quite apart from the presence of human beings within it," Cobb continues. "This means, in philosophical language, that all creatures have intrinsic value."¹⁷ God

¹⁶ Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 22.

¹⁷ Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 23.

looked at creation even before the creation of humanity and said it was good (Gen. 1:20-25). "God sees they are good without any reference to human beings," Cobb writes. "When creation was completed, God views the whole and sees that it is very good!" (Gen. 1:31). It was because of the importance of all of creation that God, through Noah, was committed to saving creation after humankind's disobedience (Gen. 7:1-3). Cobb further posits, "This story, too, certainly indicates that God has concern for other species as well as human beings. Indeed, the emphasis is on the preservation of the species."¹⁸

Unfortunately human beings have refused this participatory role with other beings in the universe, having tended to dominate instead. The way in which humankind began domesticating animals is an example of this negation:

In biblical accounts the domestication of plants and animals is associated with the fallen condition and is immediately connected with violence among human beings.... The eating of the fruit fits well the self-objectifying, or self-transcending....¹⁹

Deep ecology²⁰ has strongly argued that human beings are

¹⁸ Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 23.

¹⁹ Cobb, Matter of Life and Death, 27.

²⁰ Deep ecology is an ecological movement which is concerned with the relationship of human beings with other species in the natural world. This movement is particularly associated with Paul Shepard, one of the most profound thinkers about the relation of human beings to other species and the natural world in general. It also refers to the study of the interconnectedness of being in the interconnected universe in relation to the total

just one part of creation, and therefore should seek ways to be interrelated with other species and contribute to the richness of the whole ecosystem.²¹

The fall of humankind in the Genesis narratives was a metaphor of a disrupted cosmic equilibrium in the eco-community. The narratives of the Garden of Eden clearly depict that humankind was originally in a state of oneness with God and creation. This oneness with God and creation was disrupted by humankind's attempt to differentiate itself from the rest of creation. This desire to be more than what God intended it to be disrupted the ontological equilibrium leading to humankind's feeling of estrangement from God and from the rest of creation. The eating of the forbidden fruit and its consequences is a metaphor describing this disruption of the intercosmic connectedness of all life in the ecological community.

The Development of Anthropocentrism
in Western Christianity

Traditional Christian theology has heavily borrowed metaphors from Greek philosophies and the scientific, mechanistic, deterministic views of the universe as propagated by modernity. Traditional Western Christian theology continued to carry the theme of platonic and

environment. See Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 26; and Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 76.

²¹ Cobb, Matters of Life and Death, 26.

dualistic views of the universe. As pointed out earlier, platonic dualism conceptualized the universe in two opposing parts: light versus dark, immortal versus mortal, soul versus body, culture versus nature, beings versus non-beings, spirit versus matter, and heaven versus earth. This dualistic thinking also influentially operates on superior and inferior principles, where superior tends to dominate all inferior principles.

Sallie McFague's work explains this dualistic mind-set in traditional Christian Theology. McFague says that the Western mind-set has accorded intrinsic value along with the duties of justice to the upper half of the dualism. Meanwhile, this mind set has considered it appropriate of those on the lower half to be used for the benefit of those on the upper half.²² McFague, therefore, proposes a paradigm shift in theological reflection. This shift will conceptualize the world in holistic terms. McFague proposes a theology that will emerge from God in which beings come together in mutual participation in God's creation. She urgently calls for a theological paradigm shift away from an anthropocentric view of the universe to a cosmocentric view of the universe.

If theology is going to reflect holistically, that is, in terms of the picture of current reality, then it must do so in ways consonant with the new story of creation. One clear directive that this

²² Sallie McFague, "An Earthly Theological Agenda," Christian Century 108 (1991): 13.

story gives theology is to understand human beings as earthlings (not alien or tourists on the planet) and God as immanently present in the processes of the universe, including those of our planet....for theologies emerging from a coming together of God and humans in and on the earth implies a cosmocentric rather than anthropocentric focus.²³

Cobb and Griffin have also observed that in traditional Western Christian theology there is a sharp separation of the spiritual and non-spiritual realm of reality. This separation continues to influence Western society by separating what is valuable by itself from what is not. Cobb observes that the Aristotelian doctrine of "psyche" or "soul" led to the idea that the human psyche was conceived as having more intrinsic value than the animal psyche. Even though Aristotle attributed the principle of life to both humans, plant and animals, Cobb argues that Aristotle made a distinction between the former on the basis of the ability to reason.

In the West the major basis for drawing sharp lines separating what is valuable in itself from what is not has been the doctrine of the psyche or soul. For Aristotle, psyche was the principle of life and hence was attributed to plants and animals as well as to human beings. Even so, he made a distinction between vegetable, animal, and rational souls, limiting the last to humans.²⁴

Cobb observes that in Western Christian theology a sharp distinction has been made between what is valuable in itself and what is not valuable. It is this distinction that is

²³ McFague, 14.

²⁴ Cobb, "Beyond Anthropocentrism," 140.

clearly reflected in the doctrine of "psyche" where the uniqueness of the rational soul is emphasized, associating it with the Imago Dei as we see in the Genesis narratives. This association of the rational soul with Imago Dei is problematic for Cobb because it excludes other beings from becoming the subjects of divine redemption.

Christian theology stressed the uniqueness of the rational soul, associating it with the image of God that in Genesis is attributed only to humanity, and viewing it as the object of divine redemption. This religious and ethical point of view supported an absolute gulf between human souls and sentient beings at other levels. Indeed, the term soul came to refer self-evidently to the human soul alone. The hierarchy of levels of soul gave way to a dualism of ensouled human beings and soulless animals.²⁵

Cobb notes that Darwin's reductionistic and evolutionary theory also re-introduced a hierarchical view of the psyche. He observes that in the evolutionary process, the human psyche is seen as intrinsically more developed than an animal psyche. Thus, the Darwinistic and neo-Darwinistic notion of survival of the fittest becomes a norm to express this hierarchical concept.²⁶ Reflecting on the upward causation hypothesized by evolutionary theory, Griffin summarizes Huston Smith's perspective that the modern worldview had either lost faith in transcendence or had accepted a universe without life.

²⁵ Cobb, "Beyond Anthropocentrism," 140-41.

²⁶ See Cobb, "Beyond Anthropocentrism," 141; and David Griffin, Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 18.

Smith can sum up the modern worldview either as the loss of faith in transcendence or as the acceptance of a lifeless universe. These two descriptions come to the same thing, which is reductionism, the belief that every higher thing is explainable in terms of low things. All causation is upward, from the lower to the higher. This outlook implies that we are derived not from a transcendent, divine reality but from lifeless bits of matter. This worldview comes to fullest expression in the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution, according to which we are the products of a blind, material process, from which all divine influence is in principle excluded. This modern worldview involves a complete reversal of traditional viewpoint.²⁷

Griffin understood that for Smith, this modern worldview involves what Smith calls "incalculable loss" and how this worldview affects people's self image in relation to the universe.

Smith believes that this modern worldview involves an incalculable loss, and he is concerned primarily with its effects upon our self-image. Growing up with this worldview, modern men and women are deprived of the beliefs and values in terms of which virtually all previous peoples lived their lives. Earlier people saw their world as an enchanted garden, whereas moderns see it as a meaningless machine. Earlier people believed their [divine] origin and therefore their very essence to be spiritual; modern people are taught that their origin and therefore their very essence is material. Modern people are the first to believe they originated not from gods but from

²⁷ Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982), xii, 76, 95, 101, 199n, 169-71, 173; as quoted in Griffin, *Primordial Truth*, 18. Smith is one of the most influential critics of the modern worldview and of the relativistic post-modern outlook.

savages. Earlier people tried to live up to their self-image; modern men and women have been busy living down to theirs.²⁸

Robert Bellah, coming from a sociological perspective, notes the same shift in the understanding of the universe within his own study of the religious evolutionary process. The cosmology is lost in what he calls "religious evolution." Bellah particularly notes that at an historic stage of religious evolution, cosmological monism is replaced by fragmentary forms of cosmology, characterized by what Bellah calls "transcendentalism."²⁹ Then "transcendentalism" gave way to the Cartesian dualism which made distinctions between this world and the world hereafter.

A holistic view advocates that cosmocentric theology affirms the kingdom of God as the hope of the universe, where both soul, body and other beings are all redeemed. This notion of a cosmocentric universe is the eschatological basis of the kingdom of God. Jurgen Moltmann says a universal cosmic eschatology was developed by St. Paul in his epistles: "The anxious expectation of creation awaits

²⁸ Huston Smith, "Two Evolutions," in On Nature, ed. Leroy S. Rouser (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 46, as cited in Griffin, "Premodern and Post-modern Philosophical Theology," in Primordial Truth, 18-19.

²⁹ Robert Bellah, Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 32.

the revelation of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19).³⁰

Moltmann observes that

[i]n the experience of God's Spirit, persons are not being separated from their bodies in a Platonic manner but they wait for the redemption of the body, that is, they wait for the new body entirely permeated by God's spirit--the "spirit body."³¹

Redemption in this case is always holistic overcoming dualism.

Similarly feminism has critiqued this dualistic way of looking into reality. Drorah Setel says that this dualistic perception is inextricably linked with oppression, essentially relating a concept of separateness between female and male human beings, as well as other categorical distinctions such as "material/spiritual; emotional/rational; night/day; death/life; passive/aggressive; bad/good; body/soul; feminine/masculine; female/male."³² In this dualist mind set, the biological distinction between female and male are polarized to such a degree that the latter is differentiated from the former.

Anthropocentrism in the Theories of Religious Development

The development of what has been classified by early

³⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, "Eschatology and Pastoral Care," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, ed. Rodney Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 362.

³¹ Moltmann, 362.

³² Drorah Setel "Feminist Insight and the Question of Method," in Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 36.

anthropologists as "religious evolution" has been studied in relation to archeological and ethnological evidences. While the archeological account provided the artifacts, the ethnological account provided a basis for community connection to what was referred to as "primitive communities." Both of these accounts were, however, influenced by the ethnocentrism of those who conducted the research. Therefore, their findings tended to be prejudiced against those religions that were different from their own and hence their findings reflected the European metaphors of anthropocentrism as the norm.

The initial approaches to the origin of religion was begun by Edward Burnett Tylor, an Oxford professor, in his book Primitive Culture.³³ In his attempt to deal with the question, how the notions of soul and spirit began, Tylor argued that the notions of soul and spirit began as a result of human attempts to deal with their realization of the state of finitude which threatens their existence. Until this crisis, "primitive" religion was considered atheistic. He employed the term "animism" to refer to this stage of the theory of religious evolution. The development of this evolutionary theory was in tune with the general evolutionistic views of his time, as advocated by the naturalist Charles Darwin. Tylor's view on animism was

³³ Edward Burnett Tylor, Sr., Primitive Culture, Library of Religion and Culture (New York: Harper, 1958).

characterized by his assumption that the earliest forms of religion originated from the notion of the plurality of spiritual beings. Tylor failed to use animism in its positive Latin rootage, but used the term to discredit African religion, and claimed it as a less developed form of religion.

For Tylor, animism stood for the relationship between humans and the spirits or souls which are believed to embody both animate and inanimate objects. In his theory, Tylor argues that the ideas of continuation of the soul after death become necessary for the so-called "primitive mind." This developed in order to deal with the fear of death, by refusing the reality of death as final. Without keen study on the nature of African religion, Tylor described African religion as animistic. While it is true that belief in spirits occupy a special place in the African religious universe, to use this single fact to describe the whole religion is a serious misconception of its nature.

Furthermore, Tylor's theory of animism as the initial form of religion has been questioned and challenged.³⁴ Robert Marett has argued for animatism as a preanimistic stage of religious evolution.³⁵ For Marrett, belief in

³⁴ See Kees W. Bolle, "Animism and Animatism" in The Encyclopedia of Religion, eds. Mircea Eliade et al. (New York: Mcmillan, 1987), 301.

³⁵ Robert R. Marett, The Threshold of Religion, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1914).

impersonal supernatural power (mana for melanesian) had been antecedent to the animistic belief which held that nature abounded with localized spirits.³⁶ Impersonal supernatural power (mana), according to Marrett, preceded the personification of power as spirit as Tylor had argued. However, even though Marrett's theory differed from Tylor's, neither were able to articulate the concept of cosmic universal life force (NTU) as an immanent life force in all beings in the Bantu universe. Our concern here however, is not to go into their differences and similarities, but to point out that those descriptions were inadequate to describe African religion.

Animism, as an evolutionary theory, was based on the dualistic and deterministic mechanical worldview of the nineteenth century which operated on the principle of causal efficacy. Following this deterministic and mechanical thinking of his time, Tylor developed one principal cause for religious development.³⁷ Even though Tylor did not invent the term "animism," he used it and gave it a new meaning and interpretation. For Tylor animism was the "ground work for all philosophy from savages to civilized man."³⁸ It was from this new meaning that Tylor used

³⁶ See Bolle, 296-97.

³⁷ See Bolle, 301.

³⁸ See Paul Radin, introduction to The Origins of Culture, by Edward Burnett Tylor (New York: Harper, 1958), x.

"animism" to describe the African religion. For Tylor, African religion was at the preliminary stage of the evolution of religious development. Tylor believed that religious evolution begins with a belief in spiritual beings as described in his use of "animism."

In Tylor's theory of religious evolution, the notion of the "soul" or "spirit" inherent at this early stage of evolution gave way to the notion of a nature-spirit that he believed to be embodied in both animate and inanimate objects. Hence, in Tylor's animistic worldview at this religious stage everything tends to have a spirit and a personality. On the one hand, Tylor's idea of the African universe as populated by spiritual beings was a step forward toward understanding the nature of the African universe; on the other hand, his notion that the spirit of both animate and inanimate objects are capable of immigrating and entering other bodies was mistaken.

Unfortunately, Tylor's theory of religious evolution was biased against African religion. Clear evidence of this is his classification of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as higher religious forms. He failed to treat African religion with respect as a valid form of religion that deserved treatment on its own merit and in its own context. In his critique of Tylor, Mbiti says that Tylor's theory of religious evolution failed to take into consideration the fact that there are other theories suggesting an

evolutionary religious development which began with a monotheistic concept and moved upwards to polytheism and then to animism.³⁹ A clear example of this downward religious development from monotheism to polytheism is reflected in Deuteronomic Biblical history and prophetic books of the Old Testament (such as Deuteronomy and Isaiah respectively) where we see an evidence of religion development from monotheism to polytheism. The prophets of Israel were opposed to this religious shift.

Another misconception of Tylor lies in his dualistic description of animism and attributing it to the nature of African Religion. Paul Radin observes that Tylor regarded his animistic theory as consisting of two concepts. The first part consisted of the individual soul which continued to exist after the destruction of the body, and the other part consisted of hierarchical and powerful spirits of the deities. This description tended to distinguish souls from spiritual beings.⁴⁰

Tylor's approach gave impetus to later theories of religious evolution. Those who followed him included Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Paul Radin, Bronislaw Malinowski, Robert Bellah and Joseph Katagawa. As previously mentioned, most of these early approaches about African religion used hierarchical thought forms, and

³⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 7.

⁴⁰ Radin, x.

therefore classified African religion as less developed. Even though these early approaches broke ground for study into the nature of the African religious universe, these approaches toward African religion were equally prejudiced and antagonistic.

Spencer, in his work Principles of Sociology, used phrases like "ancestor worship" to describe the religion of what he called "savage" peoples.⁴¹ He argued that "savage" people worshiped the spirit of their ancestors which were also associated with certain objects. Spencer used the term "ancestor worship" to describe the African religious universe without studying the concept of the living dead in African cosmology. It is true that there is a close association between the living and the living dead within the African universe, but to describe it as the worship of ancestors is mistaken. In the African religious universe, the living dead are considered part of the living members of the family. Therefore, there is a close communion or veneration that goes on between the living and the living dead, and this communication is not understood as "worship" of them but as veneration.⁴²

These early approaches to religious evolution show a considerable shift from a cosmocentric emphasis to an

⁴¹ Herbert Spencer, The Principles of Sociology, 3 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1899-1900).

⁴² Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 9.

anthropocentric emphasis as religions evolved through what Bellah calls "stages." However, different Western scholars have used different terminologies to describe virtually the same notion of religious evolution. Similarly, Durkheim described African religion as "totemistic religion," a term popularized by Freud. Both were influenced by William Robertson Smith, who had previously argued that totemism was identified with myths of family objects which served as guardian spirits.⁴³ Moreover, Bellah and Kitagawa have hypothesized the following five stages in religious evolution: primal (primitive), archaic, classical, early modern, and modern. These five stages of religious evolution are reflections of the changes in historical development.⁴⁴

It would be difficult in our time to classify a religious system, at any evolutionary stage, as the early Western scholars did, without falling into the same trap of misrepresentation. Religious systems are always in dynamic process, it would be difficult to classify African religion at any of these proposed stages without misrepresenting it.

Therefore, the main purpose of this dissertation is not to argue for or against religious evolution, even though I would also argue for the latter, but to point out that there

⁴³ William Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of the Semites, 3rd ed. ([New York]: KTAV Publishing House, 1969), 641.

⁴⁴ See Bellah, 25.

was something intrinsically valuable in what was classified as "primitive religions" by the early scholars of religion. This writer's position is that at whatever of these five religious evolutionary stages a religion falls is not my concern; each religion must be examined in its own context. The concern is to revalue those scholastic positions that devalued African religion and take a serious look into the nature of African religion and how it would contribute to our understanding of life in the universe.

Mbiti describes African religion as "an ontological phenomenon" because it deals with the existential question of being and meaning.⁴⁵ African religion is a way of life which begins long before birth and continues after death.⁴⁶ The fact of being in the universe is seen as a religious drama in which all beings are co-participants. To be in the world is to participate with other beings in this religious drama. This drama of life is acted out in a religious universe from which all experiences are "experienced through religious understanding and meaning."⁴⁷ This religious understanding of the universe calls for different ways of seeing the universe, where everything in the universe attains a religious meaning and value. Mbiti says,

⁴⁵ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 15.

⁴⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 15.

⁴⁷ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 15.

The point here is that for Africans the whole of existence is religious phenomenon; man [sic] is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe. Failure to realize and appreciate this starting point has led missionaries, anthropologists, colonial administrators and other foreign writers on African religions to misunderstand not only religions as such but the peoples of Africa.⁴⁸

Compartmentalization from other aspects of an individual's and group's life does not exist, since life is experienced in holistic and sacred terms. This holistic aspect is expressed in ritual patterns, that serve to portray social solidarity, and induct the children into the norms of the society.⁴⁹ This aspect of integration of the self into the ecological community is fully developed in chapter four. Bellah clearly describes this aspect of African religion, although he subsumes it into his "archaic stage" of religious evolution.

The basic worldview is still, like the primitives', monistic. There is still only one world with gods dominating particular parts of it, especially important being the high gods of the heavenly regions whose vision, knowledge, and power may be conceived as very extensive indeed....archaic religions tend to elaborate a vast cosmology in which all things divine and nature have a place.⁵⁰

While the holistic worldview emphasized an holistic view of the universe, the dualistic worldview tended to emphasize the transcendental aspect of the other realm of life beyond

⁴⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 15.

⁴⁹ Bellah, 29.

⁵⁰ Bellah, 29-30.

the physical world. In this religious evolutionary process, Bellah further observes a particular shift of emphasis in terms of humanity's place in the universe. While in the cosmocentric universe, a human was seen as a co-participant with other beings in the universe; in the dualistic universe, humanity is seen taking charge of the universe, and hence taking a central place.⁵¹ Consequently, instead of humanity being in a harmonious relationship with the universe, egocentricism is observed as the desired mode of humanity in their relationship to the universe in historic, early modern and modern religious, developmental stages.

Toward New Views of African Cosmocentric Religion

This approach could not continue without being challenged by contemporary scholars. Joint efforts of both African and European scholars were involved in these contemporary approaches. These new approaches upon African religion were spearheaded by Tempels, Jahn, Taylor, Kagame, Mbiti, Mulago, Kibicho, Parrinder, Pritchard, Leinhardt, Idowu, and Turner, whose contributions will become evident in this work.

Placide Tempels' contribution opened a new chapter in the study of African religions and philosophy. In his book Bantu Philosophy, Tempels clearly shows how so-called "primitive people" have a concrete conception of being and of the universe as one unit of a unified whole. Tempels

⁵¹ Bellah, 33.

describes this understanding of the universe in ontological terms. He says that the Bantu people cannot conceive of a person as an individual existing by him/her self, unrelated to the surrounding animate and inanimate forces. It is not sufficient to say he is a social being. Humankind feels part of a vital force in actual intimate and permanent rapport with other forces--a vital force both influenced and being influenced by them.⁵² This aspect of religious ontology will be dealt with in Chapter 2. This notion of the unified universe is equally expressed by Janheirz Jahn, in his book Muntu, in which he uses the Bantu concept of NTU to describe the unity of the African universe and the place of beings in it. The NTU concept will also be dealt with extensively in Chapter 2.

John Taylor's contribution to the African religious universe, in his book The Primal Vision, is also a breakthrough into the nature of the African universe "as [an] unbroken cycle of life force."⁵³ "In this primal view," Taylor writes, "man's position vis-a-vis the world, therefore, is not one of exploitation but relationship."⁵⁴ The well-being is understood in keeping in harmony with

⁵² Placide Tempels, Bantu Philosophy (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1969), 103.

⁵³ John V. Taylor, The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion (London: SCM Press, 1963), 75.

⁵⁴ Taylor, 75.

cosmic totality. As Mbiti says, "Taylor managed to considerably penetrate African thought by breaking through former prejudices and presenting African religion and its people with respect and honor."⁵⁵ A similar attitude towards African religion is seen in Parrinder who, in his book African Traditional Religion, presents an accurate view of the universe without devaluing this way of viewing the universe.⁵⁶

Mbiti says Parrinder gives an "accurate presentation of the main items in African religions. The writer is both sympathetic and critical, and handles his material, from many parts of Africa, in a simple but scholarly way."⁵⁷ His work captures the cosmocentric nature of the African universe. This aspect is not devalued as was the case with early approaches to the nature of the African religious universe.

Another important contribution is the work of Pritchard, who lived among the Nuer people of Sudan for many years. Pritchard writes through the eyes of the Nuer people and attempts to break down various prejudices of early Western European scholars who had misrepresented the African religious universe. Pritchard presents the African concept

⁵⁵ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 12.

⁵⁶ Edward Parrinder, African Traditional Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1954), 20-21.

⁵⁷ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 12.

of God, humanity and creation, and how the universe in African thought system is conceived as one organic unit. A similar approach was taken by Lienhardt, whose work was done among the Dinka people of the Sudan. In Leinhardt's work, Divinity and Experience, as Mbiti points out, Leinhardt gives a wonderful description of how the Dinka people value life in the universe and how they see beings in the universe converging in the cosmic experiences of all beings in the universe.⁵⁸

Furthermore, as the Meru people say, "Kanyiri kainagua ni mwene" (it is the owner who knows the steps of the dance). In spite of these Western European contemporary scholars who treated the African religious universe with a sense of respect, the contribution by Africans themselves has been the turning point for the study of African religion. Here we find a paradigm shift in the treatment of African religion. African contributions have not only respected the study of African religion, but have made the study an essential discipline worthy of being studied within academic circles with as much merit as any other religious systems.⁵⁹ The African contribution has brought African traditional religions the same salvific value as any other

⁵⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 13.

⁵⁹ Oyeka Owomoyela, "Africa and the Imperative if Philosophy: A Skeptical Consideration," in African Philosophy: The Essential Readings, ed. Tsenay Serequeberhan (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 177.

religion in the world. This approach called for the rejection of the earlier religious evolutionary approaches that tended to classify African religion as a less developed form of religion.

This turning point can be attributed to the commitment of African scholars to the study of African cosmology. While the African view of the universe will be given a special place in this study, it must be understood that Kagame, who himself is a Bantu, has made a great contribution into the nature of African cosmology. Kagame uses Bantu philosophical concepts to articulate Bantu cosmology. In his research, he identified the NTU philosophical concept as a cosmic universal life force in the universe, which connects everything together into one unified whole. This cosmic universal life force (NTU) is the cosmic center from which everything is interconnected. This cosmic center (NTU) operates on the communal "we" principle.

Mbiti categorically denies the theories of religious evolution as they were developed by the early scholars of African religion. He proposes an authentic study into the nature of African religion, even though his apologetic approach leaves much to be desired. His approach tends to show how African religions can be similar to the Western religious systems. For instance, in his description of the place of humanity in the universe, he tries to show how the

African universe is anthropocentric and hence not different from the Western individualistic conception of humanity in relation to the universe. Unfortunately, he does not take seriously the Bantu cosmology which sees NTU as the cosmic center from which all life is centered. The Bantu cosmology objects to a universe that is centered in humanity alone.

Vincent Mulago's examination of the nature of African traditional religion and Bantu cosmology, is another basic contribution which deals with the unity of life and participation in the universe. All beings are seen as participants towards the enhancement of the life force (NTU) in the universe in a united bond of participation of all beings in the ecological community from which ethical codes are regulated in the celebration of the life force in the community.⁶⁰ Mulago further argues that African traditional religion has a central place in personality formation and communal integration. It overcomes the Western dualism as reflected in Newtonian and Cartesian cosmology. African traditional religion has a psychological and social function to integrate persons, and to maintain social and psychological equilibrium. It assists persons to understand their place in the unified interrelated universe and to accept themselves as co-participants with other

⁶⁰ Vincent Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 119-32.

beings in the panstructured universe. It is this holistic cosmic aspect of African traditional religion that gives no room for dualism since life is viewed in holistic terms:

Thanks to religion, the duality between human beings and their world, visible and invisible, is overcome and unification achieved.

In black Africa, "religion permeates everything. Its guiding influence extends to political, social, and family life."⁶¹

It is this aspect of African traditional religion that makes it a way of life and not a metaphysical religion whose symbols are divorced from everyday life. It is an ontological phenomenon. The essential characteristic of this religion among the Bantu people resides in the ontological relationship between religion and daily life. The two are inseparable, unlike in Western individualistic religious society. Kagame captures this ontological dimension of African traditional religion when he mentions:

Religion is not an abstract principle, nor even a collection of such principles, but a leaven which makes these principles work, vitality involved as they are with the religious laws and ceremonies which give external expression to this vitality.⁶²

African traditional religion is an ontological shield from meaninglessness without which life would be unbearable. It plays a vital protective role. Mulago summarizes many

⁶¹ Mulago, "Traditional African Religion," 127.

⁶² A. Le Roy, La religion des primitifs Etudes sur l'histoire des religions, no. 1 (Paris, 1925), 57-58, quoted by Alexander Kagame in La philosophie Bantu comparee, 304, as cited by Mulago, "Traditional African Religion," 127.

French sources to this effect:

Profoundly integrated into social and technical life, it permeates with its ritual all daily activities, and encloses people in a strong network of defenses and certitudes. It plays its part fully in the situations of traditional life.⁶³

.....
If we want to build an integrated and balanced society, to give Africa a chance to remaining true to herself, to develop her culture and traditional civilization in a modern spirit, then religion must be given the first place and must be made the foundation and the top of the cultural edifice of black Africa in general and of the Bantu people in particular.⁶⁴

Similarly, Jacob K. Olupona expresses the significance of African traditional religion, in contemporary African societies, in shaping the character of the people of Africa.

IT IS QUITE EVIDENT that African traditional religion plays an important role in shaping the character of African society and culture today.

⁶³ J. C. Froelich, Les nouveaux dieux d'Afrique (Paris, 1969), 50, as quoted in Vincent Mulago, "Traditional African Religion," 128.

⁶⁴ See Colloque sur les religions (Abidjan, 1961; Paris, 1962); Les religions Africaines traditionnelles (Paris: Rencontre Internationale de Bouake, 1965); Les religions Africaines comme source de valeurs de civilisation (Colloque de Cotonou, 16-22 Aug. 1970) Paris, 1972; Religions Africaines et Christianisme (Colloque International de Kinshasa, 9-14 Jan. 1978); special numbers of Cahiers des religions Africaines XI, 21-22, 1977; XII, 23-24, 1978; L'Afrique et ses formes de vie spirituelle (Deuxieme Colloque International de Kinshasa, 21-27 Feb. 1983); special number of Cahiers des religions Africaines XVII, 33-34, 1983; Mediations africaines du sacre. Celebrations creatrices et langage religieux (Troisieme Colloque International de Kinshasa, 16-22 Feb. 1986); and special number of Cahiers des religions africaines XX-XXI, 40-42, 1986-1987, as cited in Mulago, "Traditional African Religion," 128.

Yet, this tradition continues to suffer from lack of acceptance and inadequate understanding of its central tenets and essence.⁶⁵

It is upon these significant roles which African traditional religions play in the cultural and identity formation of the Bantu African people that the study of African traditional religion has taken a new dimension in African scholarship. "The newness of this approach," Olupona writes, "is in treating African traditional religion not as a fossil but rather as one of the most important building blocks of modern African Life."⁶⁶

The study of African traditional religion will not only help the African people to recapture an essential part of their identity and cultural formation, but will also make a significant contribution to the current philosophical/theological debate in Western society.⁶⁷ The current struggle in Western society is to recapture the nature of reality in the unified universe which was lost during the Enlightenment and the modern period as reflected in both Newtonian and Cartesian cosmology. Thus, African traditional religion provides a hope in this struggle to recapture the unified universe. This reclamation is crucial because the African traditional religion offers a worldview

⁶⁵ Jacob K. Olupona, introduction to African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 1.

⁶⁶ Olupona, 2.

⁶⁷ Olupona, 4.

that is in tune with current new discoveries in both scientific and theological communities. The cosmology in African traditional religion is also in tune with the new discoveries in contemporary physics and process theology whose cosmology rejects both Newtonian and Cartesian models.

In this respect, therefore, African traditional religion provides a worldview that will make a significant contribution to this current Western debate. Olupona posits, "[The] African traditional system has a lot to offer humanity and that the post-modern worldview which the West is currently formulating, will have an ally in traditional African culture [religion]."⁶⁸

It is from this significant understanding of the African traditional religion and its significant place in the life of the African people, that Mulago makes the following therapeutic statement concerning African religion:

Religion has the psychological and social function of integration and equilibrium; it enables people to understand and value themselves, to achieve integration, to accept their situations in life, to control their anguish.⁶⁹

Consequently, African traditional religion provides an essential framework for integration of the self into the ecological community. This integration of the self leads to healing and wholeness. This component of integration will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁶⁸ Olupona, 4.

⁶⁹ Mulago, "Traditional African Religion," 127.

Psychology and Anthropocentrism

The psychoanalytic, behavioristic and humanistic models of psychology emphasize the need for self-differentiation and self-actualization. This human need to affirm identity and to prove self-worth in the face of the universe is a contributing factor to anthropocentrism. It has been suggested by Michael Stark that this need emerges in the process of establishing one's personal identity in the universe and in the process of seeking a place of "belongingness." The struggle for an individual is to establish and to guard a sense of one's unique personal identity and importance, in a way that requires judgment and evaluation of the "self" while always in opposition to other beings in the universe.⁷⁰ The core of the struggle is to push oneself to the center of "everybody-else" in order to be whole.

Stark's notion of coenocentrism clearly presents the problem of egocentricity for us. He strongly argues that egocentricity comes from the sense of a deficiency in being, which seeks satiation through confirmation and assurance. The feeling and need for humanity to be self-centered emerges from the experience of this deficiency of being, and leads to feelings of wanting to prove oneself worthy in the midst of other beings.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Stark, 30.

⁷¹ Stark, 29.

The criteria for this affirmation and assurance may vary from society to society, depending on its philosophical, religious-historical and social location. However, even though it may vary, Stark feels that the underlying basic misconception is that value is not inherent in existence but is earned and therefore must be measured in opposition to others and be proved. This view denies the ontological basis of existence and belonging where one does not have to prove oneself existence in order to belong. In this sense, egocentricity becomes a disease of anthropocentrism, which operates under the presupposition that well-being will be achieved by individuals who successfully struggle and establish personal individual identity and worthiness. One comes to believe that through hard work, one can single oneself out, in the face of the universe, as an individual, achieving being. For Stark, human behavior confirms this assertion. People wholeheartedly strive to bolster their self identities to attain a sense of existence, value belonging and happiness by behaving in ways and pursuing ends that have not provided lasting satisfaction in the past, and will never do so in the future. The problem with this way of seeking a sense of belonging is that it leads to frustration, isolation, narcissism, failure and despair because this way demands unrealistic, constant, and frequent reaffirmation through new achievements and conquests. This way of viewing life

negates the very basis of the Christian doctrine that we are made whole by grace alone and not through our own efforts. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9, NAV). In case of any failure to achieve the determined goal, one is led to a feeling of annihilation simply because being, value, worthiness and belongingness are equated with the outcome of ones' effort.⁷² On the contrary, Clinebell strongly argues against this way relating to the universe: "Basic trust is revitalized in persons by their awareness of belongingness to, of being at home in the universe."⁷³

Anthropocentrism fosters egocentricity in the sense that anthropocentrism encourages the perception of oneself as a unique, separate individual. This human tendency to differentiate and separate individuals introduces a sharp distinction between subjects and objects, which calls for total and complete self-differentiation and individuation from other beings. In the West, this anthropocentric egocentricity has been developed and justified philosophically through Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes and Newton.

This dissertation, on the contrary, suggests an alternative model of pastoral psychotherapy, which is based

⁷² Stark, 30.

⁷³ Clinebell, Growth Counseling, 123.

on the Bantu worldview where human beings do not struggle to affirm their sense of value, worth and belonging since value and worth are ontologically inherent in all forms of existence. There is no need to be the center of the universe. This becomes a necessity because prevalent traditional models of pastoral psychotherapy have been greatly influenced by Western individualistic, anthropocentric and dualistic philosophy.

This necessity is picked up by Freud in the development of psychoanalysis. Freud's psychoanalysis depicts humanity as the center of the universe and hence divorced from other cosmic systems. This influence has expanded to such an extent that it has tended to see individual lives as separate entities. The Western individualistic traditional models of psychotherapy have been heavily influenced by this view of the universe, where individuals become the central focus in therapy. The Bantu universe is conceptualized as cosmocentric rather than anthropocentric. Cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy, therefore, proposes a model of psychotherapy that takes the Bantu worldview very seriously; where therapy is done from the eco-community's frame of reference. As in family systems theory, where therapy is done in reference to the family members,⁷⁴ the cosmocentric model of pastoral

⁷⁴ Murray Bowen, Family Therapy in Clinical Practice (New York: J. Aronson, 1978).

psychotherapy deals with therapeutic problems not only from a family's frame of reference, but from an eco-community's frame of reference. In cosmocentric therapy, a pathology emerging from the so-called "individual" is seen and treated as a problem of the whole eco-community. The individual's pathology will only be seen as a metaphor of the pathology existing within the eco-community. The basic, guiding principle of the proposed cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy is that the so called "identified patient" is not necessarily the sick person. If this is the case, it would be unrealistic to do therapy from the individual's frame of reference because individual problems are a reflection of a systemic breakdown within the eco-community's network.

The problem between current Western traditional individualistic models of pastoral psychotherapy and Bantu Africans is that the former emphasizes personal identity in the face of the universe at the expense of communal identity. Models of individual-centered psychotherapy, represented by Freud, Skinner and Rogers, contradict the Bantu view of the universe. The Bantu view conceptualizes the universe in terms of an ontological interdependence of beings who share the same common life-force--the NTU. Modern psychoanalytic traditions tend to focus exclusively on intra-psychic factors of individuals in isolation from psycho-cosmic factors in the universe. This exclusive

intrapsychic focus poses serious problems for the Bantus who conceptualize life in psycho-cosmic terms, not exclusively in terms of intra-psychic separate parts.

Therefore, this dissertation proposes and develops a more adequate, complete, contextualized and holistic model of pastoral psychotherapy that is based on the Bantu conception of the universe where the universe is ontologically conceptualized as affirming and assuring. It is not necessary to go through the hard process of proving one's existence and worthiness in the face of the universe in order to affirm one's being, value and worthiness since existence value, worthiness and belongingness are ontologically inherent in all existence. The Bantu African universe provides such an affirming worldview where all life is ontologically affirmed. This way of viewing the world acknowledges the Christian doctrine of grace where existence, value worthiness and belongingness is God's free gift to all beings in the universe which can never be earned.

Chapter 2

The Bantu Universe

The Bantu worldview emerges from African traditional religion which has a lot in common with the views of post-modernism. However, even though elements of modernism have found their place in many Bantu communities, we can still say that the views of modernity have not overwhelmed Africa. Secularism and materialism has not yet found a permanent root in the Bantu understanding of the universe. The Bantu philosophy of life is still influenced by the traditional African religion to the degree that its cosmological framework is still intact. The Bantu worldview is closely associated with the post-modern worldview in that they both are open, dynamic, incomplete and always in the process of becoming. Moreover, they are pregnant and aligned with new options for future possibilities.

The future of post-modernism may be greatly aided as it finds support in the Bantu worldview, which objects to the individualistic, deterministic and mechanistic worldview of the nineteenth century. Bantu thought accepts a holistic worldview with all the dimensions of depth in the areas of matter/energy, in space and time, and in the process of creation of life, giving the West a new look into the nature of reality. This way of viewing the world opens new possibilities, new imaginations, new intuitions, new creativity, and new horizons into the nature of the holistic

universe.¹

This chapter attempts to address the Bantu Universe and its cosmocenteredness. The works of Tempels, Kagame, Mulago, and Mbiti shed some light in this attempt. However, even though this dissertation will call for a reevaluation of a few of their conclusions, they have opened a new chapter of understanding into the nature and study of the Bantu universe.

Contrary to the individualistic mechanistic view of the universe, life in the Bantu universe is not static because it can either increase or decrease, or ebb and flow within a wider cosmocentric existence. Mulago captures the participatory nature of the Bantu people when he says:

On the basis of a study of three Bantu peoples, the Bashi of Central Kivu in the Congo, the Rwanda and the Barundi, we reached the conclusion that participation in a common life is the main if not the only basis of all their family, social, political and religious institutions and customs.²

Swailem Sidhom also captures the Bantu notion of participation in the universe in his understanding of the universe and humanity's place in it.

¹ Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen, "The Place of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa," in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 38.

² Vincent Mulago, "Vital Participation: The Cohesive Principle of the Bantu Community," in Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs, eds. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1969), 137.

Existence-in-relation sums up the pattern of the African way of life. And this encompasses within it a great deal, practically the whole universe. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family, and himself. Into each avenue he enters with his whole being, without essentially distinguishing the existence of any boundaries dividing one from the other.³

It is evidently true that the Bantu's universe is full of beings and not things. In the Bantu view of the universe, there is no neutral ground because the whole reality is the primary concern. Gerhardus Cornelius Oosthuizen strongly argues that the African universe is not objectified, as we see in classical modern science,⁴ but is inclined toward a totality within the universe which creates a deep sense of kinship within the eco-community.

For the sake of clarity, it is significant to point out that the term Bantu was a term coined by a Dr. Bleek referring to a group of people across Africa whose philosophical, religious and ontological existence is expressed by the use of the suffix NTU or TU or DU which stands for being.⁵ The NTU from Bantu philosophy is the universal cosmic life-force which ontologically and religiously connects all beings in the universe. Through

³ Swailen Sidhom, "The Theological Estimate of Man," in Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs, eds. Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1969), 102.

⁴ Oosthuizen, "Place of African Traditional Religion," 41.

⁵ See Brown, 17.

NTU (being) beings in the universe are cosmically connected with humans (antu), the soil (muthetu) the clouds (matu), a place (guntu) and with a thing (gintu).

The prefix Ba or Aba, in its Bantu linguistic formulation, means people, and from this prefix the term "Bantu" emerges, which literally means "the being-people" or "the people of beings." Therefore, when one speaks of the Bantu, it refers to the people themselves across Africa whose philosophical, religious and ontological existence, at the face of the universe, is expressed by this ontological, philosophical universal cosmic life force of an interconnectedness of beings (NTU).⁶

Bantu ontology is understood to be centered on the value of vitality or life force. Individual beings emerge and share in this common life force. The cultural practices and ceremonies of the Bantu people are centered around enhancing this ontological universal cosmic life-force, the NTU. Among the Meru Bantu of Kenya, this vital force, NTU, is perceived as an ontological power: Inya. The term Inya does not refer only to physical strength, but refers to a universal cosmic life-force. For example, when one says "I have Inya," what one means is the integrity of the whole being. This Inya cannot be earned, because it is a God-given life-force to all beings who are expected to enhance it. The Meru Bantu speak of God as "Mwene inya" who is the

⁶ Brown, 17.

bearer of the life force.

A Cosmocentric Universe

The Bantu universe is a religious universe. It is immersed in the Divine immanent power. The universe is viewed as having no distinction between the sacred and profane. The Bantu universe is composed of four major ecological communities which are interdependent with each other. These four ecological communities are the human, the environmental, the potential, and the divine. The human communities are formed by the living members of the community, the living dead, spirits, and the unborn. The environmental communities are formed by plants and animals, animate and non-animate beings. The potential communities are the communities beyond the self (see Figure 1, p. 66). In the Bantu religious universe, the potential community gives new possibility for inclusiveness. This is the community that is enfolded yet contributing to our experience. It progressively unfolds itself in the process of continuous creativity. The divine communities consists of divinities who are equal and related to each other and to the whole universe.⁷ This understanding of the universe portrays a holistic universe where there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the profane, between

⁷ Aloysious Okechukwu Ogonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity and Religious Education: A Perspective from an African Worldview, Ph.D. Diss., School of Theology at Claremont, 1992 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1992), 52.

spiritual and material, between religious and non-religious.⁸ All four ecological communities are in complete interdependence with each other, all evolving on one single universal cosmic universal life force, the NTU, which is immanent in all beings in the universe. The NTU as the universal cosmic life force interconnects all four ecological communities of the universe, bringing all beings in the universe into one organism of interdependent beings. The NTU is the universal cosmic force at the center of the Bantu universe. The following figure demonstrates this dimension of the panstructured universe (see figure 1 on p. 66).

⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 2.

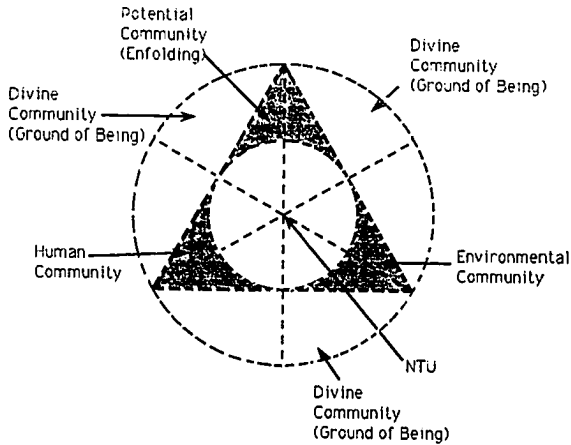


Figure 1
The Bantu Panstructured Universe

Bantu Ontology

Kagame, having been influenced by Tempels' work, investigates the Bantu philosophical concept as a basis of understanding the Bantu ontology by basing his work on the Banyaruanda people of Central Africa. It has been pointed out by Jahn that most of the Bantu languages are languages of classification and this distinguishes them from many European languages whose substantives are not divided but are grouped into classes. These classes determine all beings in the universe, whether they are animate or non-

animate. They all share the same philosophical stem--the NTU (Universal cosmic life force). Kagame uses the kinyauruanda Bantu language to explain this ontology. The NTU is depicted as a universal cosmic life force, the power in which all beings are connected together in the universe. He distinguishes four basic philosophical concepts from the root NTU:

- i. muntu--human being
- ii. kintu--thing
- iii. hantu--place and time
- iv. kuntu--modality⁹

All beings, all essence in whatever form, can only be classified under these four ontological concepts. Among the Bantu, nothing can be conceived outside this ontology.

Everything there is must necessarily belong to one of these four categories and must be conceived of not as substance but as force. Man [sic] is a force, all things are forces, place and time are forces and 'modalities' are forces. Man and woman (category Muntu) dog and stone (category Kintu), east and yesterday (category Hantu), beauty and laughter (category Kuntu) are forces and as such are all related to one another. The relationship of these forces is expressed in their very names, for if we remove the determinative the stem NTU is the same for all the categories.¹⁰

This notion of the Banyaruanda ontology parallels the Meru and Gikuyu ontology and this is true of all other Bantu languages.

⁹ Kagame, La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'Etre. Bruxelles, 1956, as quoted in Janheinz, Muntu: African Culture and the Western World, trans. Marjorie Grene (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1961), 100.

¹⁰ Jahn, 100-01.

	<u>Banyaruanda</u>	<u>Western</u>	<u>Meru</u>	<u>Gikuyu</u>
i	<u>Muntu</u>	human being	<u>Muntu</u>	<u>Mundu</u>
ii.	<u>Kintu</u>	thing	<u>Gintu</u>	<u>Kindu</u>
iii.	<u>Hantu</u>	place and time	<u>Guntu</u>	<u>Kundu</u>
iv.	<u>Kuntu</u>	modality	<u>Untu</u>	<u>Undu</u>

In Bantu ontology, NTU is the universal cosmic life force immanent in all beings categorized in Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu, in the case of Banyaruanda. NTU, as the cosmic universal life force, is the center through which all beings coalesce and could be understood as a central point where the "living and [the] dead, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, are no longer conceived of as contradictory"¹¹ but as an aspect of the same reality.

Jahn sees NTU as the central point from which creation flows: "I am seeking a far off point from which creation flows, where I suspect there is a formula for man [sic], beast, plants, earth, fire, water, air and all circling forces at once."¹² Jahn observes that the NTU as a Bantu ontological concept does not only express the effect of the forces but expresses their very being. Jahn articulates the NTU concept by adapting Kagame's philosophical concept of the four ecological categories. These categories are Muntu, which includes God, persons, Spirit, the departed and

¹¹ Jahn, 101.

¹² Jahn, 101.

certain trees; the Kintu, which includes plants, animals, mineral and other non-animate objects; the Hantu, which includes the category of space and time; and the Kuntu, which includes the modality and hence deals with categories of beauty and laughter.¹³ According to Jahn, the NTU is the universal cosmic force that interconnects all these cosmic categories such as Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu.

NTU is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu. NTU is Being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern, rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestations. NTU is that force in which Being and beings coalesce. NTU is --so we may say by way of suggestion--that Something which Breton probably had in mind when he wrote: "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a central point of thought at which living and dead, real and imaginary, past and future, communicable and incommunicable, high and low, are no longer conceived of as contradictory."¹⁴

This aspect of Bantu ontology will be discussed extensively in the latter part of this chapter.

Tempels says that all beings in the Bantu universe possess the NTU of their own.

In the minds of Bantu, all beings in the universe possess vital force of their own: human, animal, vegetable, or inanimate. Each has been endowed by God with a certain force, capable of strengthening the vital energy of the strongest being of all creation: man.¹⁵

¹³ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 11.

¹⁴ Werner Haftmann, Paul Klee (Munchen: 1950), 96, as quoted in Jahn, 101.

¹⁵ Tempels, 46.

Tempels, in his work with the Bantu people (especially the Baluba people of Zaire), found that the Bantu universe is centered on the NTU. NTU is found in everything which is interrelated in an ontological web of existence. This web of existence stands in contrast to the dualistic view of the universe found in classical modern science. The scientific concept of separate substantive beings entirely independent one from another is foreign to the Bantu thought. The Bantu hold that created beings preserve a bond of unity with one another, an animate ontological relationship comparable with the causal tie which binds creature and creator. Beings interact with other beings, force with force--transcending mere mechanical and psychological interactions; thus the relationship of forces can be called ontological.

The nature of this ontological force manifested in interrelatedness in this cosmocentric universe influences the whole cosmic system because everything is connected to one single life force.

Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network.¹⁶

Even though Tempels' notion of the Bantu universe was centered on the life force, nevertheless, because of his western individualistic philosophical influence on the centrality of humanity in the universe, he failed to see the

¹⁶ Tempels, 60.

fact that the Bantu universe is not centered on humanity. Tempels contradicts his own statement (quoted above):, "The created universe is centered on man. The present human generation living on earth is the center of all humanity including the world of the dead."¹⁷

A similar contradiction is seen in the work of Mbiti, who, in his work African Religions and Philosophy, very strongly argued that the African universe is populated with spiritual beings, spirits and the living dead.¹⁸ On the other hand, he later contradicted himself by saying that African ontology is basically anthropocentric.¹⁹ The concept of NTU among the Bantu as a cosmic life force conflicts with Tempels' and Mbiti's anthropocentric conception of the universe and instead advocates the cosmos as a meaningful understanding of the Bantu universe where all beings are interconnected with each other. This understanding of the universe calls for a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric focus to a cosmocentric focus, where God is seen as the ground of all life force (see Figure 1).

Kenneth Kaunda affirms this cosmocentric aspect of the African universe:

I believe that the Universe is basically good and that throughout it great forces are at work

¹⁷ Tempels, 64.

¹⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 75.

¹⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 92.

striving to bring about a greater unity of all living things. It is through co-operation with these forces that Man will achieve all of which he is capable. Those people who are dependent upon and live in closest relationship with Nature are most conscious of the operation of these forces: the pulse of their lives beats in harmony with the pulse of the universe. They may be simple and unlettered people and their physical horizons may be strictly limited, yet I believe that they inhabit a larger world than the sophisticated Westerner who has magnified his physical senses through invented gadgets at the price, all too often, of cutting out the dimension of the spiritual.²⁰

This view of the universe reveals a universe where everything is a part of everything else that exists in the universe. There is a fusion of NTU with NTU forming a circuit of one organism.

This vision of the Bantu worldview should be the basic focus of a therapy that will operate from the eco-community's frame of reference. This model of therapy calls for a paradigm shift from anthropocentric individualistic psychotherapy to cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy as a model for the future. This new model proposed will be developed fully in chapters five and six.

Concept of Being

Tempels, speaking of NTU, this cosmic universal life force inherent in all beings, writes:

Metaphysics studies this reality, existing in everything and in every being in the universe. It is in virtue of this reality that all beings have

²⁰ Kenneth Kaunda, A Humanist in Africa: Letters to Colin M. Norris from Kenneth D. Kaunda (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 22-23.

something in common, so that the definition of this reality may be applied to all existent forms of being.²¹

This understanding of being does not provide any room for the possibility of dualism because the cosmic universal life force (NTU) is inseparable from the being itself. This cosmic unity of life force (NTU) is expressed by Tempels when speaking from his Western individualistic and dualistic standpoint.

We can conceive the transcendental notion of "being" by separating it from its attributes, "Force," but the Bantu cannot, "Force" in his [sic] thought is a necessary element in "being," and the concept "force" is inseparable from the definition of "being." There is no idea among Bantu of "being" divorced from the idea of "force." Without the element "force," "being" cannot be conceived.²²

The Bantu ontology is dynamic and not static, as may be the case in the Western world. Tempels, from the Western point of view, says, "We hold a static conception of 'being' they [Bantu] a dynamic."²³ The cosmic life force (NTU) is bound with the concept of beings.

It is because all being is force and exists only in that it is force, that the category "force" includes of necessity all "beings": God, men living and departed, animals, plants, minerals. Since being is force, all these beings appear to the Bantu as forces. This universal concept is hardly used by the Bantu, but they are susceptible to philosophical abstractions though they express them in concrete terms only. They give a name to

²¹ Tempels, 49.

²² Tempels, 50-51.

²³ Tempels, 51.

each thing, but the inner life of these things presents itself to their minds as such specific forces and not at all as static reality.²⁴

It was this aspect of Bantu ontology that the early anthropologists misinterpreted and described "dynamism." Tempels observed that the Bantu clearly make a distinction between different life forces. The early anthropologists misunderstood the Bantu ontology in their thinking that the Bantu Universe was animate by some external supernatural universal force. This Western interpretation of Bantu ontology is dualistic and does not describe the Bantu ontology.

It would be a misuse of words to call Bantu "dynamists" or "energists," as if the universe were animated by some universal force, a sort of unique magical power encompassing all existence, as certain authors seem to believe, judging from their treatment of "mana," "bwanga," or "kanga." Such is an European presentation of a primitive philosophy that is but imperfectly understood. The Bantu make a clear distinction and understand an essential difference between different beings, that is to say, different forces. Among the different kinds of forces they have come to

²⁴ A missionary to the Ubangi (Belgian Congo) writes to Tempels: "My researches in linguistics confirm in my mind how universally African your study is. Among the Ngbaka the 'substantive' indicates a thing less as 'that' than as 'thus.' We contemplate the 'being' of the thing, they contemplate its 'force.' It is the extent, more or less, to which a thing is vital force that constitutes for them the 'being' of the thing." Quoted in Tempels, 52-53.

recognize, just as we do, unity, individuality but individuality clearly understood as meaning individuality of forces.²⁵

The Bantu ontological conception of being is essentially non-dualistic. It opposes a dichotomy between body and spirit, for one cannot exist without the other. Tempels observes this from the Western standpoint.

When "We" differentiate in man [sic] the soul and the body, as is done in certain Western writings, we are at a loss to explain where "the man" [sic] has gone after these two components have been separated out. If, from our European outlook, we wish to seek Bantu terms adequate to express this manner of speaking, we are up against very great difficulties, especially if we are proposing to speak about the soul of man [sic].²⁶

The soul of a human is not understood outside the human him/herself for the two are one single entity. Therefore it would be incorrect in Bantu ontology to translate the word Muntu to stand for "person" since even though a person possesses a visible body, the body is not the Muntu in isolation from the soul and other beings. It is a man or woman who, in totality, becomes Muntu.

With the above as background, this dissertation will now focus on the four ecological categories of NTU from the perspective of a specific Bantu people, the Meru of Kenya.

The first category is Muntu. The Muntu category refers to human beings who are coterminous with the living dead. This category includes "the living and the dead, Orishas,

²⁵ Tempels, 53.

²⁶ Tempels, 54.

Loas and Bon Dieu."²⁷ As a force, the Muntu has intelligence, but this difference is only in terms of degree and not in essence.

The second category is Gintu. This is the category which the Western mind would call "thing," but in Bantu ontology, Gintu is conceived as "being" with its life force just like other beings. In the category of Gintu belong plants, animals, animate and inanimate objects. The difference between the Muntu and Gintu is only a matter of degree and not of essence. The Muntu and Gintu as manifestations of the life force are constantly influencing each other in every actual occasion. Jahn observes that many Bantu groups linguistically classify some trees in the Muntu category: "In many Bantu languages, therefore, trees belong, linguistically speaking, in the Muntu class. Yet, when a sacrifice is made to a "tree," it is never the plant for whom the sacrifice is meant, but the loas or ancestors, that is, the Muntu forces that are journeying along with it."²⁸

The third category is Guntu. This is what in the west may be referred to as place and time. Guntu is conceived by the Meru Bantu in terms of being. It is a force which localizes spatially and temporally to a degree that every event and every motion of all beings are forces which are

²⁷ Jahn, 102.

²⁸ Jahn, 102.

constantly in motion.²⁹ The Meru traditional concepts of time and space are conceived without any reference to a clock. This is what makes the concept of time unique in the Bantu view of the universe. This aspect will be dealt with in the subsection that deals with the concept of time on page 93.

The fourth category is Untu. This is the category which deals with modality. The Untu in Bantu ontology refers to modality such as beauty and laughter. Beauty and laughter as modality of things is conceived by the Meru people as subjective experience. The Bantu do not make a distinction between the activity done by a being and the beings own subjective experience of the activity. They are two sides of the same coin. Jahn captures this ontology well: "Laughing is an action that somebody performs--but how is laughing to be understood as an independent force, without anybody being there to laugh?"³⁰ This leads one to consider the depth of the interplay of life forces within the Bantu universe.

Interplay of Life Forces (NTU)

The concept of beings as separate and disconnected from each other is a foreign to the Bantu people. The Bantu believe that created beings have an ontological bond with each other to such a degree as to bind the creatures and the

²⁹ Jahn, 102.

³⁰ Jahn, 103.

creator. This ontological understanding of beings contrasts the western mechanistic and deterministic view of Newtonian and Cartesian cosmology. For Bantu Tempels posits, "there is interaction of being with being, that is to say, of force with force. Transcending the mechanical, chemical and psychological interaction, they see a relationship of forces."³¹

The universal cosmic life force (NTU) influences the other forces (other beings) in this constant interaction. The interaction may increase or decrease the life force of other beings in every actual occasion of experience. The Western individualistic scholastic mind could not conceive this interaction of life forces; and because of their ignorance they called it "Magic." This ignorance led them to make the following classifications: Imitative magic, sympathetic magic, contagious magic and magic of expressed desire.³² The above terminology reveals the ignorance of Western scholarship of the nature of African ontology. Their mechanical and individualistic orientation made it impossible to perceive life in this manner of interaction. For the Bantus,

All creatures are found in relationship....
Nothing moves in this universe of forces without
influencing other forces by its movement. The

³¹ Tempels, 59.

³² Tempels, 59.

world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network.³³

Mulago, in his description of the interaction of life forces and their unity, prefers to use the term "participation" in understanding of this ontological relationship between beings. He sees a vital union of life forces between

[d]escendants, family, brothers, and sisters in the clan, with ancestors, and with God who is the ultimate source of all life.... If you wish, vital union is the bond joining together, vertically and horizontally, beings living and dead; it is the life-giving principle in all. It is the result of communion, a participation in the one reality, the one vital principal that unites various beings.³⁴

Tsenay Serequeberhan emphasizes Tempels', and Mulago's idea in a profound way:

The concept of separate beings, of substances, to use a scholastic term, which exist side by side, independent one of another, is foreign to African thought.... The African thought holds that created beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship. There is interaction of being with being, that is to say of force with force.³⁵

My attempt here has been to show how life forces are in constant interplay in the Bantu ontological system. We have seen how beings retain their intimate ontic relationship with each other, and how the ideal of distinct and separate

³³ Tempels, 60.

³⁴ Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," 120.

³⁵ Tempels, 51-52, 58, as quoted in Tsenay Serequeberhan, African Philosophy: The Essential Readings (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 40-41.

beings is foreign to Bantu ontology. This is so because all beings are completely interdependent; this is a vital circuit of life forces where all beings are ontologically dependent on each other. This ontic interaction of forces is not merely mechanical or psychic, but rather akin to the ontological interdependency which connects the creature to the creator.³⁶ Another basic principle in this interplay of life force is the principle of hierarchy of forces in the Bantu ontology. The hierarchy of life forces begins with Murungu (God) followed by spiritual divinities, ancestors, living dead, humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects which form the center of this cosmic unity.

Concept of God

The Bantu conceive of God as either male or female. However, even though some Bantu groups in Africa conceive of God as male, there are other Bantu groups who conceive of God as female. For instance, the Ndebele and Shona groups conceive of God as a female with feminine qualities. The maleness or femaleness which one or another Bantu group might attribute to God, however, does not alter the basic God concept. In fact, in many Bantu languages, the gender pronoun for both male and female is identical and in most cases there are instances where it is difficult to distinguish those gender differences without taking the

³⁶ Innocent Onyewuenyi, "Is There an African Philosophy?," in African Philosophy, ed. Tsenay Serequeberhan (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 40-41.

context into account. It is the context that determines the gender characteristic of the immanent Being. The Bantu conceive of God from this ontological standpoint: God is seen as the origin and sustainer of all existence in the universe; God is the one who holds all existence together; God is the ground of being (Murungu).³⁷

Mbiti's study shows that more than 300 groups of people in Africa conceive of Murungu as the "Supreme [immanent] Being" in the universe.³⁸ God is depicted as an ontological concept among African people and hence not a stranger to be introduced. The very nature of existence itself is an acknowledgement of this divine reality in the Bantu universe. Therefore, in Bantu traditional life, there are no atheists, since existence itself is an expression of the religious reality of God. This is summed up by the Ashanti proverb: "No one shows a child the Supreme [immanent] Being."³⁹ There is a belief that "there is power beyond the self."⁴⁰

Parrinder also observed that "fetishism" was an inadequate description of African religion because "this

³⁷ The concept of murungu, as discussed, can be compared to Tillich's notion of ground of being. See Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1:112.

³⁸ John Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 29.

³⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 29.

⁴⁰ Johana Mbogori, interview with author, Meru, Kenya, 16 June 1993.

would virtually limit it to magical and idolatry practices and sever Africa from other parts of the world where such practices are just as common."⁴¹ Terms such as animism, which bear the notion of the belief in spirits, also fail to describe the African religion in its totality, because African religion--even though it has elements of animism--is more than a mere personification of nature. Some of its most profound beliefs are in the immanent Being, and not in the departed ancestors, neither of which is strictly an animistic belief.

One of the distinct features of African Religion is its philosophical concept of life in the universe which is the life force (NTU). As Parrinder says, "More central is the concept of power or potent life what Tempels calls vital force."⁴² The Bantu speak of God as the possessor of life force (NTU) and as the strong one who possesses force. Martha Kaumeguru says that the Meru speak of God as "Mwinyaga-Mwene-inya" (the one who possesses all the force).⁴³

The Meru people cannot think of God as being withdrawn from the activities of the world. God is creatively involved in the activities of this world. However, they do

⁴¹ Edward Parrinder, Religion in Africa (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), 25.

⁴² Parrinder, Religion in Africa, 26.

⁴³ Martha Kaumeguru, interview with author, Meru, Kenya, 1 July 1993. Martha is the author's mother.

not equate God and world, as we see in Pantheism but in contrast to Pantheism, the Meru Bantus have panentheism attitude to divine reality. In panentheism God is viewed to be in all that is and at the same time more than all that is. The Bantu people do not separate God from the activity of the world, but they see God as one of the participants in the on-going creation of the universe. So panentheism would be the best term to describe the Bantu view of God. In a panentheistic natural theism, the relationship between God and the world is not only of interdependence, but also of self determination in mutual participation with each other in the continuous process of creation.⁴⁴ God here is viewed as being involved in the world in the process of creation. Marjorie Suchocki posits, "In a process world God acts with the world as it is, leading it toward what it can be."⁴⁵ It is through this participatory nature of divine activity in the universe that it becomes impossible for the divine to dominate the cosmos. As Mazisi Kunene says, "The gods cannot dominate over humanity."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Mathew Fox, "A Mystical Cosmology," in Sacred Interconnections, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 25-26.

⁴⁵ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, God, Christ, Church: A Process Guide to Process Theology (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 94.

⁴⁶ Mazisi Kunene, "African Cosmology," paper presented at the Conference on African Thought System, Center for Process Studies, School of Theology at Claremont, 5 March 1988 29.

The Bantu believe that in God's creative activity, God is an archetype who is indispensable and hence cannot be denied in the universe. Therefore, as an archetype, God is felt in cosmic events in the universe, and at the same time, being fully involved in the lives of humankind. As a cosmic universal force, God is viewed by the Bantu as the ground center of life in whom the whole universe is anchored. It is also commonly believed that God works in the cosmic systems, bringing joy and happiness to all the related parts. The immanent presence of God in the world is experienced by all beings. God feels all beings more than they feel themselves. God also feels those depths of feelings which we block from our conscious self because they are too painful for us to allow ourselves to experience. "My pain in being my pain, is God's pain."⁴⁷ As a centripetal force in the universe, God does not only bring order, joy, and equilibrium to each related part but to the whole cosmos. Because all reality is inter-cosmic, God's primary intention in the universe is a unifying vision of luring the universe into systemic unity.

The Western traditional individualistic conception of God, as an autonomous supreme being who is withdrawn in the realm of transcendence, is foreign for the Bantu and therefore problematic. Traditional Christian theology has also refused to accept the two polarities of the Godhead.

⁴⁷ Suchocki, 110.

There is a constant refusal to accept God as being equally involved in both good and evil. The temptation has been to make God responsible for only good, Summun bonum; and this denial tendency has created the concept of a supreme transcendent good God who is removed from ongoing cosmic events. This has led to the failure to affirm and acknowledge the God within us--the Immanuel God. The Bantu concept of God objects to this notion. Murungu is not up there but beneath here. God is beneath all existence. This God is the "great Muntu"⁴⁸ who is fully involved in the continuous process of creation.

Bantu Concept of Creation and the World

All the Bantu people view creation as the divine work of God. Other beings are co-creators with God in this divine creativity. This understanding is expressed through the divine attributes of God. The Merus and the Gikuyus say that God is Mumbi (one who moulds the universe). The Akamba perceive God not only as the creator, but also as mwatuanqi (one who divides equally), capturing the justice of God in his/her creativity.⁴⁹ Mbiti observes that the metaphor of mumbi as a potter is widely spread among the Bantu people of Africa. The Banyarwanda, for example, perceive God as a potter, one who moulds the babies in their mother's

⁴⁸ Tempels, 55.

⁴⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 39.

womb.⁵⁰ The potter metaphor is also used by the Merus to express the same creative activity of God in the community.

Bantu Concept of the Community

One of the contributions that the Bantu African people can make to the post-modern vision is the concept of the eco-community, a communal universe not populated with things but beings: "In the context of traditional Africa, people are surrounded not by things but by beings--the metaphysical world is loaded with beings."⁵¹ The eco-communal dimensions of the Bantu African community emerge out of their synthetic thinking, as opposed to an analytical orientation. Synthetic thinking makes it possible for the Bantu to perceive everything as interdependent, which makes the concept of eco-community a reality within the framework of the universal cosmic life force (NTU). The NTU is immanent in all existence; therefore all that exists has being. Consequently, what in the west might be called a thing, in the Bantu worldview is a being.

The concept of NTU (beings) presupposes relationships; to be a being in the community is to acknowledge this relatedness. To be a Muntu (a human being) is to be in the community of other beings who are ontologically interconnected in the eco-community. Oosthuizen put this concept in perspective:

⁵⁰ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 39.

⁵¹ Oosthuizen, 40.

Humanity in Africa is basically family, basically community, with strong emphasis on traditional religion and its symbiotic union with ancestors and spiritual entities in the metaphysical world.⁵²

The eco-community is the center of all existence which includes all beings in the universe.

This concept is symbolized by the circle, which is reflected and manifested in Bantu architectural design and communal life (traditional Bantu houses are circular in nature). This circular nature has a single pole at the center which interconnects all the parts of the building. This architectural work reflects the Bantu view of the NTU immanent in the eco-community. From a sociological viewpoint, the social life of the Bantu community is also symbolized by a circle. They dance in a circle, they eat in a circle, they deliberate in a circle and they socialize in a circle. The circle here is a symbol of completeness, equality and unity among the members of the community. As Oosthuizen comments:

The circle symbolizes this togetherness--in the houses, in dancing, singing, and in having meals in a circle. The classical African approach to being human based on personal inter-relationships is much more biblical than [the] individualism of the modern world.⁵³

Similarly, Kaunda argues very strongly that Africa's greatest gift to the world community is the gift of human

⁵² Oosthuizen, 41.

⁵³ Oosthuizen, 41.

relationships, where human beings experience the sense of being human, connected with the other beings in the universe. He goes further:

Africa may be the last place where Man [sic] can still be Man [sic]. I think that two elements have gone to make up what might be called the African philosophy of Man [sic]. These are the African's relationship with Nature and the psychological impact upon him of centuries of existence within tribal society.⁵⁴

To live in a community is the acceptance of life in its totality. As Mbiti says:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group.⁵⁵

The individual defines his/her identity in terms of the whole: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am...."⁵⁶ This understanding of the community captures the religious realm of the Bantu people. Since religion permeates all departments of Bantu life, to be in community itself is a religious calling. This notion emerges from the Bantu theological understanding that beings are created by God for each other and their purpose in the universe can only be realized and fulfilled in continuous participation

⁵⁴ Kaunda, 22.

⁵⁵ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 108.

⁵⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 108.

in the eco-community. It is this understanding of a community that makes individual salvation or wholeness a foreign concept for the Bantu people:

In the African communitarian model the redemption of the individual person is deeply grounded in community. As such, not even in salvation or perdition is an individual person disconnected and separated from humanity to which he or she belongs.⁵⁷

The creation of the eco-community is the work of God, who also lives in the community with other divinities who are participants in the same process of creation. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s statement concerning the community captures the Bantu concept: "All human effort to establish community are supported by the laws of the universe because God created the universe that way."⁵⁸

The Bantu people view the community as the heart of their relationship with God and the universe. Their interactions are guided by the basic principle that their existence is connected with God, with other humans and other beings in the community. Without the community there would be no life in the universe.

Life in the Bantu community is characterized by mutual interdependence. Each member in the community affects and is affected by others in such a way that his/her identity is

⁵⁷ Ogbonnaya, 236.

⁵⁸ Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, Jr., Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974), 131.

shaped by other members of the community. Thus, intrinsically, one can only say I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am. Harvey Jeffery Sindima observes that:

The African idea of community refers to bondedness; the act of sharing and living in one common symbol--life--which enables people to live in communion and communication with others and nature. Living in communication allows stories or life experiences of others to become one's own.⁵⁹

Life in the Bantu community is also characterized by inclusiveness. In the Bantu worldview, the concept of potential community (discussed in chapter two) provides the basis for this inclusiveness. The Bantu people have a notion of the world that is always in the process of being unveiled to them. This notion of potential community opens a door for the inclusiveness of other beings in the community. This inclusiveness is only possible because the Bantu African cosmology provides a place for it, and therefore, anticipates and acknowledges the existence of other beings in other communities who are similar to us and live more or less like us even though their story may differ from ours, but nevertheless, they share the same universal cosmic life force.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Harvey Jeffery Sindima, Malawian Churches and the Struggle for Life and Personhood: Crisis and Rapture of Malawian Thought and Society. Ph. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1987 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990).

⁶⁰ Kunene, conference paper.

This sense of participation in the community is what keeps the community together. For Mulago,

Africans believe firmly that there is a living communion or bond of life which makes for solidarity among members of the same family or clan. The fact that we are born into a family, a clan, or tribe immerses us in a specific current of life, "incorporates" us and molds us to the fashion of that community; it modifies all our being "ontically" and orients us to living and behaving in the manner of that community. So, family, clan, and tribe form wholes in which each member is only a part.⁶¹

The Bantu believe that the life force (NTU) circulates in all veins of the members of the living community. Mulago strengthens this notion of interrelationship in the life of the African community:

For Africans, beings always retain their intimate ontic relationship to one another, and the idea of distinct beings which happen to be alongside one another but completely independent is quite foreign to their thought. All manifestations of life bring out this element of interaction between beings.⁶²

To be human, therefore, is to live in this harmonious relationship in the Bantu community. It is in this web of existence that NTU is enhanced to reach its fullest potentialities. To detach oneself from this network of existence is to reject life. Mulago says,

Thus, the black African community forms a vital circuit where the members live in inter-dependence

⁶¹ Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," 121.

⁶² Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," 123.

for their mutual advantage. To want to leave this circuit and to escape from the influence of members who are vitally superior would amount to no longer wanting to live.⁶³

This notion of community pre-figures the postmodern vision of community. The postmodern vision emphasizes a communal interdependence and participation which operates on the assumption that all life is relational, where communities are connected with other communities sharing the same common destiny. "We live" Bernard Lee claims, "in a system in which whatever happens to any part of the system reverberates in small or large ways throughout the whole system."⁶⁴

Similarly, Catherine Keller holds that the notion of separateness is itself an illusion, for "No one and no thing is really separate from anything else."⁶⁵ She sees the world as a web that vibrates the world system by just pulling one part of the system, therefore for her, accepting interconnection is part of the feminist spirituality that demands a complete paradigm shift from separatedness to connectedness.

⁶³ Mulago, "Traditional African Religion," 123.

⁶⁴ Bernard J. Lee, "The Only Survivable World," in Sacred Interconnections, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 57.

⁶⁵ Catherine Keller, "Warriors, Women and the Nuclear Complex," in Sacred interconnections, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 79.

Bantu Concept of Time

The Bantu concept of time falls under the category of Guntu; there is no clear separation between space and time because the two are closely connected together:

Space and time are closely linked, and often the same word is used for both. As with time, it is the content which defines space. What matters most to the people is what is geographically near.⁶⁶

This of course contrasts with the Western materialistic conception of time where there is a separation of space and time. Jahn points out this view:

Yet European scholars, in treating what we call African culture, have always separated place and time. Westernmann wrote a History of Africa and Frobenius A Cultural History of Africa. But the 'Cultural History of Africa' is not a history of African culture. A history or cultural history of Africa remains tied to the place, to the continent Africa."⁶⁷

The Western linear conception of time championed by the modern worldview has left the impression that human beings are approaching the future, and therefore time becomes a commodity that needs to be controlled, exploited and managed:

Modern secularized people are controlled by time. Their whole civilization suffers from a time misconception. They are always tense. Their whole being is directed to a non-existent future which they plan meticulously. It is their focal point, with the result that they hardly exist in

⁶⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 27.

⁶⁷ Jahn, 190-91.

the present. The present is only a necessary stepping stone to the future, because there lies their hinterland, their utopia.⁶⁸

As a result of this conception of time, ceaseless time tension has entered human existence wherein humanity seems to need to manipulate time and make sense of it. The present moment in this western materialistic framework serves as a stepping stone to the future. The joys of the present moment are postponed for the future. This future centrality of time robs the present moment of its richness. This understanding of time was very much influenced by Darwin, from whom time attained an additional materialistic dynamic meaning.⁶⁹ This dynamic meaning of time tended to put more emphasis on productivity, hence robbing time of its subjectivity and flexibility. Kunene observes that:

This concept seems to suggest that the western system has elevated production-time or commercialized time as the only valid time description. Thus, time is mystified, objectified and regarded as absolute and terminal.⁷⁰

In traditional African religion, time is viewed as cyclical and in tune with the post-modern conception of time. Here time consists of events that have happened, that are happening, and what is about to happen. In this approach to the nature of time, the future is not emphasized as the center of time as we find it in the materialistic

⁶⁸ Oosthuizen, 42.

⁶⁹ Oosthuizen, 42.

⁷⁰ Kunene, p. 30.

modern worldview. The future, in Bantu thinking, does not constitute time, because its events have not occurred to constitute time. The Bantu concept of time emphasizes two dimensions of time: the dynamic present (Sasa) and the long past (Zamani). In this respect, the future dimension of time is not emphasized because it falls under the category of no time.⁷¹

This cyclical Bantu traditional concept of time emerges from the concept that beings are not controlled by time nor time controls them, but live with time as a co-existential cosmic reality. Oosthuizen captures this notion when he posits,

What is important is not the time factor in an event, but the event itself--not being on time for an event, but being part of it, even for a small fraction of it, is what matters. The intensity of an event matters, and this intensity is seen in the traditional religious activities.⁷²

However, due to Western materialistic influences, the Christian mission, education, science and technology, there has been a rapid social change, and time conception has tended to shift from the cyclic cosmic conception of time to a linear concept. Consequently, a change of focus has occurred, from a cosmic time-frame to the productive time-frame with a nonexistent future. This has created chaos. Because of this shift, Africa today is facing both political

⁷¹ Oosthuizen, 42.

⁷² Oosthuizen, 42.

and social chaos emerging out of this paradigm shift in time conception. Oosthuizen observes this paradigm shift with a lot of concern:

Furthermore, the shifting of time from the past to the future created a dangerously unstable situation in Africa; a disharmony as a result of the formation of what L. S. Senghor calls a "half caste" culture. The change from the traditional concept of time to the emphasis on future has led to social and political instability [which is being experienced in Africa].⁷³

This political instability is experienced by most African countries.

The basic question we need to address is why is the Bantu concept of time cosmic? The answer lies in African ontology. Time, for the Bantu, belongs to a category of being, the Guntu. This ontological notion of Guntu carries the notion of relatedness of beings in the universe. Therefore, time belongs to a category of the cosmic life force, and time coexists in the ontological relationship with other beings.

This relational dimension of time, when viewed from the Muntu (human) category, has to be humanized in order to make sense to the Bantu people. Time exists in the realm of existence, although it may be named by other beings; therefore, time is interconnected with existence itself, and to a degree, existence itself constitutes time.

In view of this existential dimension of time, the

⁷³ Oosthuizen, 43.

Bantu people find it difficult to attribute time to the distant future. Because the future has not been lived, it cannot be related to the present existence in this relational cosmic manner. In other words, the future is unreal and not connected to the present reality of the existence of beings. Using the Muntu category, one would say that since the distant future has not been humanized, it cannot constitute time; therefore, it is far removed from the present existence. "Time does not really exist apart from human activity" Newell Booth writes "it is created by human beings."⁷⁴

The Bantu understanding of time is reflected in post-modern physics. The discovery of the relativity theory in post-modern physics in Western society has opened a new way of understanding space and time that relates the Bantu concept of time. The relativity theory has rejected the western materialistic view that three dimensions of time are viewed as separate entities. In the theory of relativity, both space and time are closely interrelated.

This interrelatedness rejects the Western materialistic concept which sees time as a static commodity that can be sold and be bought. This dimension of time is more cosmic than materialistic, and it transcends the three western materialistic dimensions of time to capture the multi-cosmic

⁷⁴ Newell S. Booth, Jr., "Time and Change in African Traditional Thought," Journal of Religion in Africa 7, fasc. 2 (1975): 84.

dimensional reality of space and time:

In physics, the concepts of space and time are so basic for the description of natural phenomena that their modification entails a modification of the whole framework we use to describe nature. The most important consequence of this modification is the realization that mass is nothing but a form of energy, that every object has energy stored in its mass.⁷⁵

The Bantu people see the relationship between space and time as an inseparable reality to such a degree that there would be no space without time, or time without space. The two are inseparably linked together, and the Bantu's view of space and time have an ontological intimate connection emerging out of an intrinsically unified worldview. The Bantu concepts of space and time are reflected in their cosmic metaphors such as the movement of a revolving wheel which is constantly involved in a flow of change. Therefore, the conception of relativity introduces ways of measuring time that are no longer absolutes as was the case in modern materialistic theories.

There are two basic theories in post-modern physics that relates to the Bantu worldview. These are quantum theory and relativity theory. Quantum theory, at its very basis, reflects the Bantu view, where the universe is not composed of separate entities, but is depicted as interrelated entities where beings are participants and not

⁷⁵ Fritjof Capra, "Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism," Journal of Transpersonal Psychology 7-9 no. 1 (1976): 25.

observers, an interconnected web whose parts are only defined through their relationship to the whole.

Bohm captures the Bantu view of reality by arguing that any reality which exists separately is an illusion: "The notion that all these fragments are separately existent is evidently an illusion, and this illusion cannot do other than lead to endless conflict and confusion."⁷⁶ Consequently, Bohm calls for a paradigm shift toward visualizing reality in terms of relatedness:

What is needed in relativity theory is to give up altogether the notion that the world is constituted of basic objects or building blocks, rather one has to view the world in terms of universal flux of events and processes.⁷⁷

So for the Bantu, time is relative and not absolute. It is not divorced or separated from space but connected.

Bantu Concept of Existence and Personality

The Bantu concept of existence is to be understood through divine communal interconnectedness. To exist is to belong to the ontological web of the existence with other beings in the community. To be Muntu (human) is to belong to the cosmic circle of the divine existence with other beings who also belong. Mbiti posits that:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of the past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must

⁷⁶ Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, 1-2.

⁷⁷ Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, 9.

therefore make, create or produce the individual;
for the individual depends on the corporate
group.⁷⁸

To exist is to belong in the Bantu eco-community, which molds and prepares persons to be Muntu. To be Muntu is to be fully involved in communal participation, because whatever happens to the persons happens to the community and vice versa. To be Muntu is to belong to the ecological community where NTU is the center of communal interaction. No one becomes Muntu by himself or herself alone, without the communal interaction. As Mulago says,

For the Bantu, living is existence in community, it is participation in the sacred life (and all life is sacred) of the ancestors; it is an extension of life of one's forefathers, and a preparation for one's own life to be carried on in one's descendants.⁷⁹

All efforts of persons and community are arrived at by cementing this ontic relationship for perseverance and maintenance for a common good.

What we have done is to show how a persons existence is tied to communal existence, and how there is a vital union in the relationship between being and life in the community. But the question is: how is one connected to the universe? The figure below demonstrates how humans are ontologically connected with the universe: See Figure 2 on page 102.

⁷⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 108.

⁷⁹ Mulago, "Vital Participation," 139.

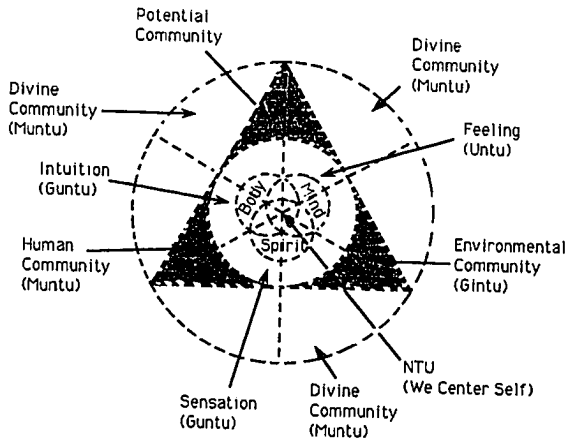


Figure 2

Ecology of Human Existence in Universe

A person's bond of existence goes beyond the Muntu category of existence. Existence is equally interconnected with other ontological categories of Gintu, Guntu, and Untu, to complete the circuit of existence. One is ontically bound to the cosmic center (NTU) because, in the Bantu universe, groups are not made up of flesh and blood, but rather complete interdependent selfhoods animated by fused lives.

The Bantu ontological existence has fused boundaries that are neither rigid nor enmeshed but permeable and dynamic:

Although the Muntu recognizes the causal nexus in the interplay of ontic influences of being on one another, his [sic] world with its causal relationships remains dynamic and fluid. The action of beings on one another is not limited by time and space.⁸⁰

The goal of the Bantu people is not to create individuals, whose identity are separated from this ontological web, but rather to help persons to fully realize their Umntu (humanity).⁸¹ To have Umntu is to be fully anchored in the ontological web of existence of other beings.

To be Muntu is to uphold and maintain an ontological connection in the universe.⁸² The Umntu can decrease or increase. However, the expectation of the community is that the Muntu will be helped by significant others to increase and realize his/her Umntu (humanity) in his/her relationship to God, to the community and to the biosphere.

On the question of existence, process thought is in tune with the Bantu view of relational existence. Cobb and Griffin argue for this relational existence:

Our existence is a being-in-the-world. There is no self apart from the world or world apart from the self, but the one reality of being-in-the world. Our existence is not simply located in our

⁸⁰ Mulago, "Vital Participation," 144-45.

⁸¹ Umntu is humanity.

⁸² Muntu is human.

bodies or our heads. The world belongs to it as it belongs to the world.⁸³

The communal existence is equally emphasized by Tillich and Alfred North Whitehead, who strongly argued that communal participation and individuality are polarities in the sense in which they are involved in identity formation of the persons in the eco-community. Cobb and Griffin capture the thought of these two thinkers who have significantly contributed to process thinking:

Instead, Whitehead affirms that we exist first of all in community and establish relative independence within it. With Tillich he holds that participation and individuality are polar, so that the more we participate with others in community the more we become individuals, and the more we become individuals, the more richly we participate in community.⁸⁴

This form of identity formation tends to be paradoxical. But in the reality of things, participation and personality are key polarities for communal identity.

Behavior and Ethics Centered on NTU

In 1950, Edwin Smith argued that African peoples had no sense of morality, hence no sense of sin.⁸⁵ This assertion portrays the depth of ignorance and prejudice of western scholarship in regard to the nature of African traditional religion.

⁸³ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 81.

⁸⁴ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 82.

⁸⁵ See Edwin William Smith, African Ideas of God, 3rd ed. (London: Edinburgh, 1966), 22.

However, everywhere in Africa morality is perceived in the context of interrelated beings. God is viewed as the chief custodian of morality, and under God there are ancestors and divinities. In many Bantu communities, God is viewed as having all seeing eyes that see all human behavior and all intercosmic relationships. In this respect, the concept of good and evil is embedded in the Bantu philosophical system not so much as two opposing forces, but rather as one reality in the same unified divine universe.

Bantu morality stands between ontological interconnectedness and ontological order where everything is embraced in the unity of the vital cosmic life force (NTU). Innocent Onyewuenyi argues, "The Africans" see a relationship between morality and ontological order. Everything is associated and coordinated under the all-embracing unity of "vital force."⁸⁶ In this respect, Bantu morality is an ontological morality, embedded in the existence within the eco-community itself. Plato had a similar idea of morality. Plato posits that Greek citizens interpreted an action to be good or evil--not in reference to selfish interest--but in reference to the community in which one is a part. This communal ethical understanding was destroyed by modernity where individuals become the center of ethical concerns.

Contrary to modern ethics, Tempels captures this

⁸⁶ Onyewuenyi, 43-44.

ontological aspect of the Bantu ethical code: "Objective morality to the Bantu is ontological, immanent and intrinsic morality. Bantu moral standards depend essentially on things ontologically understood."⁸⁷ Here we see good and evil being understood in reference to the eco-community of vital cosmic life forces. The moral laws are formulated in the light of vital forces within the eco-community. This, of course, is in contrast to the modern sense of moral justice, which measures liability by material damage. In Africa, moral justice is measured in terms of loss of life force, and loss of joy in life hence loss of fulfillment in life.⁸⁸

Bantu morality captures the cosmic center of the Bantu universe. Mulago, speaking from the Muntu perspective and category, says that "The Muntu world is very extensive but still unified, thanks to the relation and interactions between the NTU."⁸⁹

The NTU is considered as the center from which the behavior of the member is evaluated within the community, where the sense of enhancing the life force is seen as the primary goal for all its members. The Bantus recognize the unity and order of beings in the universe, which includes

⁸⁷ Tempels, 121.

⁸⁸ Jahn, 117.

⁸⁹ Vincent Mulago, Un Visage Africaine du Christianisme, as quoted in Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," 155.

the spiritual world. Tempels observes that for the Bantu

Their whole ontology which can be systematized around the fundamental idea of "vital force" and the associated ideas of growth, influences the vital hierarchy, reveals the world as plurality of co-ordinated forces. This world order is the essential condition of wholeness in human beings. The Bantu add that this order comes from God and that it must be revered.⁹⁰

Anyone who disturbs and eventually destabilizes this ethical ontology is considered an enemy to the community and therefore Mwiyia among the Meru. The term Mwiyia comes from the Kimeru verb "Kwiyia" which means to destabilize. Mwiyia is the one who destabilizes the ontological cosmic equilibrium in the universe.⁹¹ The Mwiyia is referred to as Murogi (Sorcerer). For example, the European occupation of Africa and the initial colonization process of Africa would be viewed by the Bantu as the destabilization of the ontological cosmic equilibrium. Therefore, a colonizer would be classified as Murogi. One who destabilizes the cosmic life force in the universe is an enemy of the Bantu people. This kind of moral offense was punishable by death or ostracism.

In contrast to western secular individualistic ethics, where the "individual" is central and therefore creates a feeling of egocentricism, in African traditional ethics the eco-community is seen as the center of ethical concerns, the

⁹⁰ Tempels, 120.

⁹¹ Jeremia M'Ituerandu, interview with author, Meru, Kenya, 14 June 1993.

eco-community being the Summun bonum of the Bantu moral philosophy. Friday M. Mbon affirms this aspect of bantu ethics:

Moreover, African traditional social ethics were communal, not individualistic as Western ethics tends to be. For in African traditional societies, no man [or woman] lived unto himself [sic]. That is to say, what one man [or woman] did affected, directly or indirectly, other members of his society or community.... It is because of this communal nature of this ethics that the Yoruba of Nigeria, for instance, say proverbially:

If a member of one's household
Is eating poisonous insects
And we fail to warn him (to desist)
The after-effect of his action
Would rob neighbours of sleep.⁹²

Needless to say, the picture which has been painted of the Bantu ethic has shifted due to influence of modernity and the introduction of individualism. Contemporary Bantu communities blindly adapt modernity's ethical principles and values without questioning their presuppositions. Communal centeredness is shifting to individual centeredness. The inherent value and worth of humanity in traditional society, is also shifting to a materialistic emphasis. Mbon laments this situation greatly:

The kind of ethics that is based on values of money, personal comfort and affluence, greed and avarice, is for all intents and purposes individualistic and is at variance with African traditional communalistic ethics. Such preferred individualism paves the way to the selfish way of

⁹² Friday M. Mbon, "African Traditional Socio-Religious Ethics and National Development: The Nigerian Case," in African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 102-03.

life. This way of life disturbs the harmony which existed in African traditional societies with their spirit of communal living, the very essence of African traditional communal identity. Furthermore, this way of life destroys the "we-ethos," the "we-law," the "We-logic," and the "we-ethical yardstick" by which the traditional African community measured reality.⁹³

In many African countries, because of the way in which modern society's valuing system has influenced the moral codes of the African people, there is a loud voice calling for the return to the African communal ethos which is based in one's understanding of the universe. Many African scholars see this as an alternative way of dealing with the current moral dilemma. Mbon is one of the voices among many other voices that believe

The moral salvation of Africans lies only in their immediate return to their traditional ethics of conscience, the foundation of which is a genuine concern for the welfare of all, predicated on the respect for the Supreme [immanent] Being, the ancestors, and the deities.⁹⁴

This call to return to a Bantu communal ethos is a justified call, because Bantu African ethics are not legalistic or juridical but vitalistic. The communal ethos are at the service of life and thus totally open to the morality of the Gospel: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

The Bantu African ethic is an ethic of communion with others, with people, and with the natural environment. They

⁹³ Mbon, 108.

⁹⁴ Mbon, 108.

are global and cosmic ethics; likewise Christian morality is based on communion and co-responsibility. Respect for parents and for hierarchical order is a mark of Bantu African ethics which falls in a parallel line with one of the Ten Commandments.⁹⁵ Respect for life, for its own sake, as a God-given gift for existence and conservation, is another mark of Bantu African culture.

Bantu Thought Patterns

The either/or way of thinking which characterizes modern thinking patterns is foreign to the Bantu people. Bantu thought patterns are inclined towards a both/and way of thinking. The both-and way pattern of thinking is deeply rooted in the Bantu philosophical conception of the universe as an holistic model, calling for the inclusivity of all beings. In the Bantu universe, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and profane, between natural and supernatural, between the physical and the spiritual. The universe is not viewed as having two opposing forces requiring a choice to be made between the two, hence demanding either/or way of thinking. The Bantu universe is a one unit and this non-dualistic thought process makes the both-and way of thinking possible.

Kaunda, in his observation of the differences between the Western and African thinking patterns, comments that:

⁹⁵ Mulago, "Vital Participation," 131.

The Westerner has a problem-solving mind whilst the African has a situation-experiencing mind. The Westerner has an aggressive mentality. When he sees a problem he will not rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot live with (what he perceives to be) contradictory ideas in his mind; he must settle for one or the other or else evolve a third idea which harmonizes or reconciles the other two... He draws a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural, the rational and the non-rational.... [An African has both a problem solving and a situation experiencing mind.] By this I mean they allow both rational and non-rational elements to make an impact upon them, and any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation that the result of some mental exercise.⁹⁶

A similar observation, on the nature of Bantu wisdom, is made by Onyewuenyi, where he posits that:

Study and personal search for knowledge does not give wisdom. One can learn to read, to write; but all that has nothing in common with "wisdom." It gives no ontological knowledge of the nature of beings. There are many talents and clever skills that remain far short of wisdom.⁹⁷

As we have seen, Bantu thought patterns are very African in the way in which they are synthetic and dynamic. Analytic thought patterns try to separate and atomize entities. This is foreign to the Bantu people. The Bantu universe is a panstructured universe allowing a possibility of synthetic thinking. This way of thinking stands in contrast to analytic thinking as advocated by Descartes' analytical thought that has left a legacy of dualism in western

⁹⁶ Kaunda, 29.

⁹⁷ Tempels, 74, as quoted in Onyewuenyi, 42.

society.⁹⁸

Matthew Fox's conception of the universe relates to the Bantu thought pattern which is very much rooted in the concept of NTU, as a cosmic unifying force in the universe.

We are connected to the stars and supernovas even as we go about our tasks of serving food to one another on this planet. The cosmic and the local interact in community, and in community we learn the both/and lessons of living. In community we learn that survival does not belong to the "fittest" (understood as being the "toughest"). Survival is about learning how to fit into our community and how the community fits us.⁹⁹

Fox is opposed to Darwinism, the idea of the competitive spirit and natural selection that had dominated western society since the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, this chapter has been able to articulate the Bantu worldview as the basis for the cosmocentric model where all beings are fully engaged in mutual causation. This mutual causation of life forces is not only upwards as depicted in modern classic science. The causation of life forces in the Bantu universe is multidimensional. This multidimensional causation is reflected in the dimensions of the eco-community.

⁹⁸ Alfa Ibrahim Sow, Anthropological Structures of Madness in Black Africa, trans. Joyce Diamanti (New York: International Universities Press, 1980), 81.

⁹⁹ Matthew Fox, Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 50

Chapter 3

Eco-Community

The task of this chapter is to explore the cultural dimension of the Bantu ecological community and how these dimensions are important in keeping the community as one organism. The chapter examines the dimension of Bantu family, their naming system, their spirit world and their relationship to the biosphere.

Bantu Concept of Family

The universal cosmic life force in all beings is what characterizes the ecological attitudes within the eco-community of the Bantu family system. The eco-community of the Bantu people is not only populated by human beings but also extends to include other beings, such as animals and plants as well as inanimate beings, who experience and share communal life in the universe.

The Bantu family extends vertically and horizontally. Vertically, it includes the departed and the unborn; horizontally, it includes the living members of the eco-community both animate and inanimate. Mbiti captures this cosmic dimension of family kinship system when he says,

Indeed, this sense of kinship binds together the entire life of the "tribe," and is even extended to cover animals, plants and non-living objects through the "tolemic" system.¹

This ecological dimension of family on the level of

¹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 104.

interpersonal relationship means that a person is mutano cia (a brother), or mwari wa cia (a sister), baaba (a father), ntii/tata (a mother), juju (a grandfather or grandmother), mwari wa cia and mutano cia (a cousin), untu wetu (an uncle), and gaake (an aunt). All these Kimeru kinship terms lose their original meaning when translated into English. For instance, the terms used for a brother, cousin, and brother-in-law is mutano wa cia, which literally means "the son of my mother" or "my brother." This is true for a sister in the sense that mwari wa cia would stand for a sister, cousin, or sister-in-law. The term for a paternal uncle is the same term for the father (baaba mwanake or baaba mukuru).² The nephews and nieces are expressed as one's sons and daughters, respectively. The maternal uncle is called untu wetu. Also both paternal and maternal aunts are regarded as one's mother (tata mukuru or tata mwanake and gaake respectively). "The kinship system" Mbiti comments, "is like a vast network stretching laterally [horizontally] in every direction, to embrace everybody in an any given local group."³

In the traditional Bantu community, kinship ties go beyond inter-personal relationships and extends to other universal cosmic life forces (NTU) in the universe. There

² Baaba mukuru stands for older brother of one's father. Baaba mwanake stands for younger brother of one's father.

³ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 104.

is a kinship tie with the Gintu cosmic force which is characterized by totemic feelings of kinship:

Clans are normally totemic, that is, each has an animal or part of it, a plant, a stone or mineral, which is regarded as its totem. Members of a particular clan observe special care in treating or handling their totem, so that, for example, they would not kill or eat it. The totem is the visible symbol of unity, of kinship, of belongingness, of togetherness and common affinity.⁴

As we discovered in chapter one, this ecological feeling of kinship within the Bantu people with other cosmic life forces, was misunderstood by the early scholars of religion. For instance, Durkheim misunderstood this dimension of African cosmic religiosity and described African religion as totemism by failing to see this cosmocentric dimension of the Bantu eco-community.

The Bantu concept of the family is wider than the way family is perceived within western society. It includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, who may have their own children, and other immediate relatives.⁵ What would be regarded as an extended family in western understanding, is what constitutes a part of the family in a traditional Bantu context. The family also includes the living members of the family, the living-dead and the unborn. The living-dead are the departed members of the family who occupy a central

⁴ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 105.

⁵ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 106.

place in the Bantu family system. They are fully involved in the affairs of the family in every day life. Their presence in the family is acknowledged and revered. It is believed that a sense of ontological balance needs to be maintained between them and the living members. A symbolic mystical expression of this continuous communion is expressed through the offering of food and pouring of a libation as an expression of ecological ontic communion: "The living-dead solidify and mystically bind together the whole family."⁶

This sense of family includes the unborn members of the family. The unborn are seen as the new hope for the ongoing life in the eco-community. They are potential new buds of the cosmic ontological hope for the ongoing circuit of existence. "They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished."⁷

The unity between the members of the family in the eco-community is physically symbolized by the Bantu traditional architectural houses (garu--the house of the husband and kiuru--the house of the wife and kids). The Bantu garu and the kiuru are circular in nature. In the same homestead there are several other circular ones that make one big circle. This circular nature of the Bantu architectural

⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 107.

⁷ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 107.

circle. This circular nature of the Bantu architectural work, reflects the philosophical and cosmic ontological view of the Bantu people. For the Bantu people, a circle is a symbol of equality, completeness and wholeness. It stands as a reflection of the cosmic rhythm of wholeness within a common universe.⁸

This cosmic wholeness is reenacted in the social life of the family members in the eco-community. The dances are always done in a circular manner, the recreation of social functions and traditional court are all a reflection of this unity all culminating into cosmic wholeness.

Therefore, the Bantu understanding of the family has an ontological base. It goes deeper than the biological connection to the ontological connection. It is through this ontological umbilical cord of the family that one is connected to the cosmic realities of other beings in the universe. To be a part of the family is to be ontologically connected to the cosmic universal life force (NTU) of the universe. It is this ontological connection that makes a person experience himself/herself as a cosmic being, within the family. Members of the family always attempt to maintain an ontological connection with other beings in the universe. To be cut off from this cosmic ontology is the worst thing that can happen to a person.⁹

⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 108.

⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 108-09.

Bantu Naming System

The Bantu naming ceremony is a cosmic event. It is a cosmic event because the names themselves are not just labels for identification purposes, but naming itself holds a deep ontological meaning and purpose. It is through naming itself that one is symbolically and mystically interconnected with the ontological web of existence, within the ecological community of other beings.

Through the naming ceremony, a child is ontically introduced to the universal cosmic life force (NTU) through which all beings are cosmically connected. There are names given by the community that mark those cosmic occasions of the child's birth, capturing the Guntu ontological category—for instance, cosmic names which mean rain (kangai) may be given to a child born during that cosmic occasion.

Other names are given capturing the category of Muntu. This aspect of naming will become evident in this work, especially in chapter four. Among the Bantu people, no child is born without a symbolic cosmic ontological attachment. Every child is born as someone in the ecological community. This is significant because children are seen as the cosmic continuity of the ontological existence in the ecological community. The names which are given describes the personality of the person to whom the child is born. "The name is the person," Mbiti writes, "and many names are often descriptive of the individual,

particularly the name acquired as the person grows."¹⁰

Naming is very significant to the Bantu people, not only because names distinguish pme person from another, but also because they express a deep sense of ontological connectedness with other beings in the cosmos. Tempels says that "the name is not a simple external courtesy, it is the very reality of the individual."¹¹ For instance, if you are Meru and you are named Mwiti and somebody asks "Are you called Mwiti?" Instead of saying yes, the Bantu would respond by saying (ui) "I am."¹² This kind of response expresses how the person's name are ontologically connected to the cosmic universal life force. In this respect, the giving of a name, among the Bantu, constitutes the very essence of the person as well as linking that person to the cosmic universal life force, both to the visible and invisible. It expresses the idea of continuous reincarnation of the past to the present. The Meru, like many other Bantu, believe in what is often called reincarnation, but this term should be used with care. What "returns" in the life descendants is not the "person" as in Hindu religion but the personality of the ancestor. This return of personality is symbolized by a name. So it would be true to say that a person does not have a name, but is a

¹⁰ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 119.

¹¹ Tempels, 106.

¹² Tempels, 106.

name in the sense that the person named embodies the personality of the namesake. Therefore one becomes the bearer of the name instead of being the owner of the name. This emerges from the belief that even physical death cannot destroy the personality of someone, but that his/her personality is seen as the continuation of the communal existence in the eco-community.

In one's lifetime one may acquire several names which express the Bantu notion of a dynamic personality. The person is always in the process of becoming. It is this dimension of connectedness and becomingness that makes an isolated life a foreign concept for the Bantu:

For the Bantu, man [sic] never appears in fact as an isolated individual, as an independent entity. Every man [sic], every individual, forms a link in the chain of vital forces, a living link, active and passive, joined from above to the ascending line of his [sic] ancestry and sustaining below him [sic] the line of his [sic] descendants.¹³

The Bantu people do not have so-called generational family names, because the names which are given to individuals express a continuous becomingness of the personality of the namesake of that individual in relation to the cosmic life force itself.¹⁴ This naming aspect will be dealt with more fully in chapter four.

Spirit World (Nkoma World)

The spirit world (Nkoma world) of the Bantu people

¹³ Tempels, 108.

¹⁴ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 119.

falls under the category of the Muntu. The Nkoma world is densely populated with spiritual beings, nature spirits and the spirit of ancestors. The Bantu spirit world is a religious universe, which is connected to the physical world. Both the spiritual and the physical worlds penetrate each other and are the realities of the same coin, inseparable from each other.¹⁵ Mbiti recognizes two major categories of spiritual being: the created ones and the spirit of the living dead. The created spirits are associates of God, and the ordinary spirits are those of the living dead which are regarded as intermediaries.¹⁶ The created spirits are divinities which are believed to have been created by God as his/her associates, and their functions are to carry out divine responsibilities in the universe. These divinities are viewed as God's personification in the universe who carry out divine functions. Some of the functions are connected with natural phenomena. Their function includes major events like the rising of the sun, the fall of rain and other events that move within the rhythm of natural phenomena.

The Bantu spiritual universe also is populated by spirits who are perceived as spirits in-between. Most Bantu regard these spirits as the spirits of the living dead of long ago, who have lost physical contact with any living

¹⁵ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 75.

¹⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 75-76.

members of the community. They are believed to be enjoying the state of collective immortality. They have fallen in the horizon of Zamani (long ago) and therefore have lost all physical human connection. However, they are ontologically connected to the universe through the universal cosmic life force (NTU). The status of those spirits in this state of collective immortality, even though they are closer to God, are not different from the world of the living and the living-dead.¹⁷ It is this aspect of the Bantu spiritual universe that makes the Christian notion of the transcendence of God another foreign concept to the Bantu people, because the Bantu mind cannot conceive of a God who is withdrawn from the community.

The respect for the living dead, and elders who are soon to join the ancestral spirits, is rooted in this ontological mode of existence which is seen as a transition to another status of being. Becoming a spirit not only puts one in a state of social elevation; while on the other hand, one joins a more noble state of existence where one will be providing a link between the Sasa and the Zamani (present and the past) communities.¹⁸

The Bantu also distinguish the spirit of the living-dead from the in-between ones mentioned above. The difference is not in essence but of degree. The spirits of

¹⁷ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 80.

¹⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 82-83.

departed members of the family, up to five generations, are considered to be in the Sasa (present) period and are viewed therefore as enjoying the state which Mbiti calls "personal immortality."¹⁹ Those who belong and enjoy the state of personal immortality are regarded as living-dead, who have a close memorable ontological link with the living members, for they are in the Sasa (present) period. They can effectively relate to the world of the living and to the spirit world. The spirit of the living dead are ontologically linked to the living, for they are regarded as belonging to the living members of the family. They are known by their very names and they play an integral guardian role in the family. They are guardians of family traditions, ethics, and many other social activities. An ontological balance between the living and the living-dead is significant, and any offence against the living-dead is an offence to the ancestors and hence to the life-giving spirit of the universe who is the foundation of all existence.

The living dead are considered as intermediaries between the living and Murungu. They are assumed to know the needs of the living members by virtue of their noble status of being and can therefore present those needs to Murungu in the most coherent manner. Ontological balance is maintained through the communion with ancestral spirits.

¹⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 83.

Any disequilibrium between the living and the living-dead is believed to be followed with misfortunes.²⁰

Among the Meru, the spirit of the living-dead (Nkoma cia ba juju) are venerated by the Meru Bantu people. Similarly, there are various categories of the spirits among the Gikuyu. There are spirits of the parents or forebearers (Ngoma cia aciari), spirits of the clan (Ngoma cia moberega) and spirits of the age group (Ngoma cia rika).²¹

These spiritual beings serve as a link between the invisible world and the visible, between the living and the departed. It was this dimension of the African worldview which was misunderstood by the early anthropologists and scholars of religion. They picked up only this animistic aspect of African religiosity and described the whole of African Religion as just animism and failed to see the whole dimension of the African religion.

Bantu and the Biosphere

The biosphere belongs to the Gintu category in Bantu ontology. All that exists in the biosphere is viewed by the Bantu people as beings who realize their potentialities in inter-cosmic relationships. The Bantu people experience a deep sense of kinship with the biosphere. In a sense, the biosphere is a stage upon which the ontological drama is acted out by all beings in the universe.

²⁰ Kaumeguru interview.

²¹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 89.

The biosphere itself is regarded by the Bantu as a therapeutic resource from which cosmic wholeness could be tapped for the enhancement of the wellbeing of all beings in the universe. The Bantu recognizes that the biosphere has a healing dimension of its own which needs to be tapped instead of being exploited. Freud also recognized the healing potential in the universe. Freud recognized that his method of psychoanalysis was limited and ineffective with one of his patients, Bruno Walter, who had a psychosomatic paralysis.²² Freud recommended that instead of continued psychoanalysis with him, he take a vacation in Sicily and stay on the beach, bathing in the sun. Walter did so, and his paralysis disappeared.²³ Walter's healing was cosmic in nature. He became connected with the healing forces of nature and his separated self was brought into harmony with the cosmic forces of the universe.

Similarly, Jesus' ministry of healing was cosmically centered healing. Jesus used the pelotherapeutic method. This is a treatment of a disease by application of mud. It comes from the Greek term pelos which stands for "mud" and which means "to heal." His healing brought the whole person to bear upon the unity of the self and the universe. In the

²² Bruno Walter was a famous conductor who had a partial paralysis of his right arm. When all medical treatment failed he sought help from Freud. See Clinebell, Growth Counseling, 30.

²³ Clinebell, Growth Counseling, 30.

healing of the man born blind, Jesus used the natural world (soil-muthetu) as a resource for healing man's blindness. Jesus told him to go wash his eyes at the sea of Saloam (John 9:1-8). The man's healing involved connecting his broken self with the biosphere to complete the circuit of wholeness. Tillich, focusing on Jesus' healing, puts it within the context of cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy. Jesus' healing was aimed at bridging the gap of an estranged self with God, humanity and the world, capturing the original meaning of salvation which stands for health and wholeness. In this understanding of wholeness, healing means reuniting the cosmic estranged self by overcoming the split between God and humanity, between humanity and other beings in the universe.²⁴

This dimension of cosmic healing emerges out of a deep ecological kinship between the biosphere and the Bantu people. The Bantu have a deep affinity with the natural world which reflects a very rich spiritual heritage. This affinity with the biosphere is rooted in the way in which their livelihood is dependent on the mother earth. They treat the mother earth with a sense of respect. The following Kenyan proverb points to this: "Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was

²⁴ Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1: 146.

loaned to you by your children."²⁵ They are directly connected with the earth and they nurture the mother earth and likewise the mother earth nurtures them. They are aware of this interdependence upon the life processes within the ecosystem.²⁶

Among the Meru, there is a deep affinity between the people and the land. The land is not only viewed as essential for livelihood, but also as a bed on which the ancestors eternally rest. The Merus, no matter where they go they regard their ancestral land as their home. This attachment to the land has been the driving force behind many aspects of the Meru people. Their deep sense of love for the land was the driving force towards reclaiming their land (in the 1920s through 1960s) when it was taken away from them by the British colonial government.²⁷

The affinity of the Bantu people to the biosphere emerges out of their religious spiritual heritage. According to many Bantu people, human beings live in a religious universe and they interpret the world from this cosmic awareness. The natural phenomena, animated world and natural environment have a religious meaning, which is associated with Murungu. This association is understood as

²⁵ Variations of this proverb have been repeated both orally and in writing.

²⁶ Clinebell, Growth Counseling, 30-31.

²⁷ Michael Maren, The Land and People of Kenya (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1989), 13.

a mutual interdependence between the creator and the creature, who are believed to be sharing the same universe. Ogbonnaya expresses this dimension of interdependence by saying,

The African sense of interdependence traditionally included all of nature; the world was seen as the house of the divine and place where the divine makes itself known.²⁸

The world is viewed as engulfed with NTU (life force) to a degree that nothing is divorced of NTU. So with Murungu, being the source of life force, everything is viewed to have emerged from Murungu as a testimonial of his continuous activity in the universe:

Man [sic] sees in the universe not only the imprint but the reflection of God; and whether that image is marred or clearly focused and defined, it is nevertheless an image of God, the only image known in traditional African society.²⁹

It was this understanding of the universe which was misunderstood by the early scholars of religion, when they described African religion as "naturism." They failed to see this deep ecological kinship with biosphere in its proper religious perspective. They failed to recognize that the African universe is not an empty impersonal universe, but that it is filled with religious meaning. Murungu is seen in all the natural events and the natural world which manifests his very nature, being and essence.

²⁸ Ogbonnaya, 202.

²⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 48.

The Bantu universe is not dualistic, but both the physical and spiritual dimension of the universe are two sides of the same coin--ontologically interconnected to a degree that the two cannot be divorced from each other. The two make the whole in the way in which they interpenetrate each other.³⁰

It has taken so long for western society to realize this ecological dimension of human existence, because of their dualistic conception of the universe. Western theological reflection has also been slow in seeing the universe as a village of interrelationships. However, in the last few years, process and feminist thinkers have made progress in creating awareness of this ecological kinship of beings in the ecological community. Cobb and Griffin point to this problem:

Western modes of thought have tended towards dualism; and those which gained dominance in the seventeenth century were thoroughly dualistic. An absolute line was drawn, explicitly (Descartes) or implicitly, between human beings and other creatures. Only human had any intrinsic value. The question of appropriateness of a general attitude of "reverence for life" (Schweitzer) was rarely entertained.³¹

Cobb and Griffin's views relate to the Bantu concept of the biosphere. As we have seen, the Bantu people do not see themselves disconnected from the world, but on the contrary, their selfhood is interconnected with the world:

³⁰ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 57.

³¹ Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 76.

Our existence is a being-in-the-world. There is no self apart from the world or world apart from the self, but the one reality of being-in-the-world. Our existence is not simply located in our bodies or our heads. The world belongs to it as it belongs to the world.³²

This ecological consciousness calls for a shift in theological reflection that will account for all of God's creation. Sallie McFague calls for a paradigm shift in our theological reflection.

If theology is going to reflect wholistically, that is, in terms of the picture of current reality, then it must do so in ways consonant with the new story of creation. One clear directive that this story gives theology is to understand human beings as earthlings (not aliens or tourists on the planet) and God as immanently present in the processes of the universe, including those of our planet. Such a focus has important implications for the contribution of theologians to "save the planet," for theologies emerging from a coming together of God and human in and on the earth implies a cosmocentric rather than anthropocentric focus.³³

The Bantu understanding of biosphere is in tune with and reflected in the post-modern vision of reality which upholds the interdependence of humanity and the biosphere. It is opposed to the dualistic and mechanistic outlook which depicted the human soul as different in kind from the rest of creation. It is precisely this view that has contributed to the current problem of anthropocentrism, where the value of creation is entirely in its use to humans, and wherein creation itself is viewed to have only an

³² Cobb and Griffin, Process Theology, 81.

³³ McFague, 14.

instrumental value to humanity.

Oosthuizen strongly argues that the African concept of wholeness in the unified universe would be a great contribution to the post-modern vision as a moral concern in our time. Oosthuizen posits, "Africa's deep-seated respect for the wholeness of life could make a significant contribution in the post-modern era."³⁴

Fox calls for the destruction of anthropocentrism, since it is the primary cause of the problems of human kind. He sees this as a theological necessity, in order to heal the biosphere from total destruction. For him destroying anthropocentrism is a central part of the theological agenda:

Every theologian must embark on these pathways [of living cosmology] and awaken them within if theological enterprise is to accomplish its task in our time. This will require a deep letting go of the old paradigms of education and theology. The old wineskins of an anthropocentric, rationalistic, antimystical, antimaterial worldview cannot contain the new wine of creativity that is exploding whenever minds, and hearts and bodies are being baptized into living cosmology, into the living Cosmic Christ.³⁵

The Bantu worldview provides a new way of bringing healing to a wounded world. This new way begins by preparing youngsters to see themselves as one part of the universe. Rites of passage help to integrate the self into the unified

³⁴ Oosthuizen, 45.

³⁵ Matthew Fox, The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of Global Renaissance (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 78-79.

universe. The integration begins and continues throughout the life span. It is a process of becoming one with the universe.

Chapter 4

Rituals and Life Transition

Do rituals express wholeness or contribute to psychopathology? Freud advocated the view that ritual activity expresses processes that are either identical or very close to psychopathology. Freud connected the cultural and social experiences of ritual, to what he called the Oedipus Complex. He observed that religious ritual practices are derived from the incest-taboo, emerging from the situation where a son killed his father because he was jealous of his mother:

After killing the patriarch they ate him in order to absorb his powers, and protected themselves from being similarly killed by limiting sexual relations to those women outside the immediate family.¹

However, recent studies have indicated that ritual plays a significant role in ego enhancement. Ritualization allows mutuality to occur between beings, creating the possibility of transcending separateness and leading to the cosmic integration and affirmation of all life in the universe. From this perspective, one can argue that rituals play a significant role in helping the community and restoring its equilibrium in the midst of brokenness.

Therapeutic activity is always surrounded by ritualistic activities. This is particularly evident in

¹ Pamela Couture: "Ritual and Pastoral Care" in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 1089.

Bantu communal ontology. Bantu ontology is surrounded with symbolic, spontaneous rituals of thresholds, which makes transitions possible from one state of being to another. Through rituals, one is assisted by the community in achieving a certain degree of cosmic integration of the self in the eco-community. Rituals, particularly among the Bantus, play this significant role in cosmic integration which is essential for well-being. Consequently, any effective therapeutic intervention is expected to recapture this cosmic ritualistic dimension of well-being, to help establish the cosmic equilibrium in the eco-community.

This chapter has four sub-sections. The first addresses psychoanalytic misconceptions of rites of passage. The second deals with initiation rites into adulthood, drawing insights from two regions in Africa vis-a-vis East Africa and Central Africa. The third deals with Arnold van Gennep's phases of rites of passage. The fourth deals with Eriksonian theory of transition from childhood to adulthood, focusing on issues at Erikson's fifth to seventh stages of the life cycle.

The thesis of this chapter therefore is: That rites of passage are essentially symbolic, psychological and psychosocial bridges which effectively transmit the essential psychological and psychosocial messages of life for a smooth, healthy psychological and psychosocial transition from childhood to adulthood for cosmic

integration of the self.

In the light of the above, rituals play a significant role in every community. There is no community on earth that does not have some form of ritual. Rituals always presuppose a sense of community. They have a dimension which is anamnestic in nature, allowing the expression of the innermost part of being for those involved in it. All rituals, process all cultures, follow three sequential phases which are crucial to the process of integration and reintegration of the self into the eco-community. These phases are separation, transition and incorporation. This is an area that requires close investigation; but before doing that, we might examine Jeffrey Larson's identification of five basic functions of ritual in the process of cosmic and communal integration and wholeness.²

First, Larson mentions that Erik Erikson argues that rituals have a function of establishing social and cosmic order. Through ritual, both sacred and profane realities are brought together to provide one unity in the panstructured universe.³

Second, through ritual, Larson argues that continuity is possible in the midst of change. For example, Victor

² Jeffrey J. Larson, Myth and Ritual: A Psychological-Religious Response to Anxiety, Ph.D. Diss. School of Theology at Claremont, 1990 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1990), 71-73.

³ Erik Erikson, Toys and Reasons: Stages in the Ritualization of Experience (New York: Norton, 1977), 83.

Turner has pointed out that ritual provides a significant role for continuity in the face of intercultural change. In this respect, rituals are able to do this significant function because rituals have the ability of reintegrating the past and the future, bringing them to the present dimension of time where life is lived. In a sense, ritual provides a kind of platform from which to cope with the rhythmic order of cosmic events.⁴

Third, rituals serve a preparatory function to help persons to deal with an unexpected event in the cosmic realities in their daily human struggles. This preparatory role may be expressed in social, psychological and religious terms responding to the emotional needs in a satisfactory way.⁵

Fourth, rituals assist beings to attain cosmic integration towards cosmic relational selfhood. They demonstrate what a community believes in all areas of universal life. This may be done in the reenactment of communal myths and narratives by bonding together in the eco-community.

Fifth, rituals break down individualism and open new possibilities of communal participation in the eco-community. Erikson points out this fact. Through ritual,

⁴ Victor W. Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), 15.

⁵ Erikson, Toys and Reasons, 82-83.

satisfaction for immediate personal needs are sacrificed for the sake of communal needs.⁶

This chapter's primary concern is to focus on transitional, psychological and the psychosocial rituals which assist the integration into the eco-community within their transitional process of entering into adulthood.

Most of our modern societies have lost or are in the process of losing rites of passage, which are symbolically important transitional bridges that are culturally designed for the smooth psychological transition from childhood to adulthood. The Reverend H. P. V. Renner observes this situation in Western society with deep concern:

Unfortunately, in our so called "Western" society, we have suffered considerable disintegration as far as ritual behavior goes. Certain mores and ritual forms have been reduced to tatters either by a society which has lost sight of, or abandoned, the philosophical basis for its life and can no longer see the relevance and worth of its rituals, or by "ritualists" who have failed to amend rituals so that they meet the needs of society. In the cross-cultural scenes where the disintegration of society has not occurred quite so dramatically, there are still rituals to be seen in their purer and universally accepted forms.

There are enormous cries of this kind heard from many corners of the human species, which results from a lack of psychological symbolism marking the transition from childhood to adulthood. This lack of symbolism of course

⁶ Erikson, Toys and Reasons, 82.

⁷ Paul H. Renner, "The Use of Ritual in Pastoral Care," Journal of Pastoral Care 33, no. 3 (1979): 165.

leaves young persons with no signals to inform them that they are no longer children but adults. The problem becomes much greater and even crucial when we consider the following issues: When and how do young persons become adults? What are the signals and symbols from the community to pass that message? How do young persons become aware of themselves as adults? What kind of transition do they experience? When and how does it happen and what events mark it? What changes do the young persons experience psychologically, emotionally, socially and physically in relation to their self, communal awareness, and the way they relate to the external world?

What young persons experience cross-culturally today in the process of entering into adulthood, is a double, conflicting message from the community of which they are a part. The messages they receive put them in a dilemma. For instance, they receive messages of legal obligation without legal privileges. In general young persons are expected to accept the legal obligations of an adult without adult rights and privileges. For example, one is drafted into the armed forces because one is considered old enough to fight and die, but not old enough to vote and participate in shaping his/her destiny and the destiny of his/her own community. At the age of fifteen, one is considered old enough to pay adult fare on a bus or at movie theaters, and yet in another setting too young to get a driver's license

at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

This chapter intends to address an alternative response to this dilemma, by reconsidering the place of rites of passage and the role they play in the human psyche, the community, and in the psychological aspects of human development.

We will draw some basic insights from two basic African communities, where rites of passage continue to serve as bridges of integration that transmit psychological messages of a change of status of being from one to another vis-a-vis from childhood to adulthood.

Mbiti comments that many of the African communities have rites of passage which are psychosocially designed to assist a person's integration into the corporate life in the eco-community. This psychological and psychosocial transition is multidimensional. It is experienced physically, socially and religiously both by the individual and the eco-community:

The initiation of the young is one of the key moments in the rhythm of individual life, which is also the rhythm of the corporate group of which the individual is a part. What happens to the single youth happens corporately to the parents, the relatives, the neighbours and the living-dead.⁸

Through rites of initiation, a young person is ritually introduced into the life of the eco-community (mwiriga). The rite itself has symbolic significance and meaning.

⁸ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 121.

Through rites of passage, youngsters are passed through the process of dying and living in the world of spirits and other beings and are reborn (resurrected) into the eco-community.⁹

We begin by looking at the African scene as the basis from which rites of passage could be re-examined. We will examine only one aspect of Rites of Passage vis-a-vis initiation Rite of Passage into adulthood. As we shall discover, initiation procedures vary from one community to another. However, the psychosocial and psychological cosmic integration process is essentially the same.

Psychoanalytic Interpretations of Initiation Ceremonies

In the past, the psychoanalytic tradition paid little interest in what goes on in rites of passage. Most of the past psychoanalytic literature did not reveal any interest in rites of passage, but they offered criticism on initiation ceremonies in their explanation of the Oedipus Complex. The psychoanalytic theory emphasizes the libido and the Oedipus Complex, where the conflict between the father and the son is explained in the light of the circumcision initiation rites of passage. Solon T. Kimbali says,

The psychological interpretation of initiation ceremonies at the time of puberty gives support to the theory. Circumcision or other acts of violence imposed upon the initiates are interpreted as punishment inflicted by the father

⁹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 121.

figures to give meaning to the threat of castration if the sons continue in their sexual desire for the mothers. The rite is interpreted as a reinforcement of the incest taboo.¹⁰

Kimball points out that Freud, in his book Totem and Taboo, attempted to explain that there is an origin of existential jealousy between the father and the son: "He posited the original patricide arising from the son's jealousy of their father because of his monopolization of the females. Subsequently, the acts were commemorated by totemic rites which included taboos to prevent its recurrence."¹¹

In the light of Freud's understanding of the initiation rite, Theodore Reik confirms Freud's interpretation and understanding of rites of passage. He uses the same understanding of rites of passage and explains it in the light of Freud's conception of the Oedipal Complex.¹²

Anthropologists have categorically rejected that part of Freud's theory, in which he attempts to explain the origin of initiation rites in the light of the Oedipus complex. Anthropologists accuse the psychoanalytic interpretation as being insensitive to psychosocial and

¹⁰ Solon T. Kimball, introduction to The Rites of Passage by Arnold van Gennep (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), xv.

¹¹ Kimball, xv.

¹² Theodor Reik, Ritual: Psycho-Analytic Studies, trans. from the 2nd ed. by Douglas Bryan (New York: W. W. Norton, [1931]), 86-87.

psychological implications of interpretation.

Jomo Kenyatta convincingly argues that the initiation circumcision rites of passage is a deciding factor which makes persons psychologically and socially become a man or a woman. He says that the initiation for both sexes is the most important custom among the Gikuyu people of Kenya: "[The initiation rite] is looked upon as a deciding factor in giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Gikuyu Community."¹³

Kenyatta looked into the significance of initiation rites of passage, as he was responding to the early missionaries and British colonial government officials, since they were abolishing the custom of initiation on the grounds of health reasons. In Kenya the early medical missionaries and clergy in 1930 had decided to abolish the Gikuyu custom of initiation because of the surgical operation that goes on in the initiation rite. They attempted this without considering the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu people. They had failed to see that the operation had very little to do with the rite of passage itself. For the Gikuyu's, the operation was only a vehicle to transmit enormous psychosocial, psychological and moral messages for cosmic integration of the self into the

¹³ Jomo Kenyatta, Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu (1938; reprint, London: Mercury Books 1961), 133. Kenyatta was the first president of Kenya. He died in 1978.

ecological community.¹⁴ Kenyatta argues,

The real argument lies not in the defense of the surgical operation or its details, but in the understanding of a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu--namely, that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution which has an enormous educational, social, moral, and religious implications, quite [different] from the operation itself.¹⁵

Arguments in favor or against the initiation of circumcision rites of passage in Africa would only make sense when argued from religious, psychological, anthropological and sociological standpoints. This is because in the initiation circumcision rites of passage, the emphasis is not the operation itself but psychological, and psychosocial integration of the self--shifting the status of being in the life cycle of young persons to an emerging and expanded sense of the self which includes other selves.

Initiation rites of passage have nothing to do with the Oedipus Complex as Freud argued. It has nothing to do with castration anxiety as the psychoanalytic tradition has argued. The initiation circumcision rites of passage deal with critical issues of manhood or womanhood in the process of cosmic integration. It deals with issues of becoming male and female, and interpersonal relationships within a family, community, and the cosmos. It is a psychosocial device specifically designed by the community, and offered

¹⁴ Kenyatta, 133.

¹⁵ Kenyatta, 133.

by the community to young persons to help them achieve an integration of the self into the new status of being in the life cycle. Therefore, initiation rites of passage deserve special attention in their own right and merit. Kimbali feels it is most likely that mental illness, which is at an increase among young persons today, occurs because the majority of these young persons are forced to make their transitions to adulthood alone with private symbols instead of the community getting involved in this process of integration.¹⁶

The Initiation Rite into Adulthood

Most African people have initiation rituals and ceremonies which signal the psychological message of change from childhood to adulthood. Any child born into an African society is expected to grow from childhood to adulthood. This growth is expected and reflected within all five dimensions of human development: physical, psychological, psychosocial, emotional and religious. John Mbiti says:

The initiation of the young is one of the key moments in the rhythm of individual life, which is also the rhythm of the corporate group of which the individual is a part. What happens to the single youth happens corporately to the parents, the relatives, the neighbours and the living-dead.¹⁷

The initiation rites of passage begin with the physical withdrawal of the initiates from their family members for a

¹⁶ Kimbali, xvii.

¹⁷ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 121.

period of time, during which they receive instructions on matters of the new status into which they are being initiated. This period of withdrawal is followed by a period of making a physical, social, religious, and psychological transition from one status of being to another. The initiation at this point is the psychological gateway to this new status of being.

Concerning the initiation as a vehicle through which psychological and psychosocial messages are being transmitted to young persons, Eleanor Bertine says, "initiations are sort of ordeals through which young persons take a step from childhood to adulthood."¹⁸

The initiation rite of passage is not an individual affair but a communal affair. One is not initiated into oneself, but is initiated into the eco-community. In the initiation rites of passage, one makes a psychological and psychosocial transition of status of being. Bertine further says,

The old self is killed in order that a new and better may take its place. This is a very powerful symbolism for a psychological change. It is no picturesque simile for changing one's mind, but involves a drastic inner construction. The candidate does not do it to himself it is done to him [sic].¹⁹

¹⁸ Eleanor Bertine, Jung's Contribution to Our Time: The Collected Papers of Eleanor Bertine, ed. Elizabeth C. Rohrbach (New York: Putnam, 1967), 68. This collection was published by Putnam for the C. G. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology in honor of the author's eightieth birthday.

¹⁹ Bertine, 69.

However, the term "killed," which Bertine uses here to describe this psychological shift, is a misleading term when viewed from the Bantu African context. The childhood is not killed in the process of initiation, but is integrated. This psychological and psychosocial transition is done to him/her by the community of which he/she is a part. The community where he/she enters is a community of intercosmic relationships. The initiates enter into the eco-community of the living, the living dead, the unborn, plants, animals, and celestial objects. Through initiation, one becomes a member of a wider communal system as a responsible new being.²⁰ So through initiation, society witnesses manhood or womanhood in-the-making, in the lives of their children, as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. As pointed out earlier, young persons are reborn not only to living members of the eco-community, but also into the departed members of the eco-community, the living dead and to the world of spirits, and the whole cosmic reality. This cosmic integration is symbolized by new names.²¹ The new names that are given to initiates are symbolic in nature. The new names not only point to the psychological change of status of being, but also mystically and religiously bind initiates to both the living and the living dead. The new names strengthen and seal the bond of the eco-community,

²⁰ Bertine, 70.

²¹ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 121.

creating a sense of solidarity, and a sense of kinship, with all other beings in the universe.

In light of the above, let us examine initiation rites of passage from two specific African communities, where initiation plays a key role in transmitting psychological and psychosocial messages of change from one state of being to another in this process of cosmic integration.

East Africa

The countries that make up East Africa are Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Each country has more than fifty ethnic communities with different languages. My concern will be to look into one group of Bantu people in this region, the Tigania of Meru.

The Tigania people are found in the north eastern part of the Imenti Division of the Meru District. Among the Tigania people, circumcision is a rite of passage which is recognized and carried out with great respect and anticipation. The whole rite may sometimes take two to three months to be completed. Circumcision rites of passage are not only significant to those who are being initiated into another status of being, but also significant for the community as a whole, who also participate in ensuring their support to the initiates who are in the process of making a transition into a new status of being. Now let us look into more detail on what goes on in the circumcision rite of passage. This rite of passage is performed upon both boys

and girls among the Tigania people. For the sake of this sub-section, we shall only look into one initiation rite of passage vis-a-vis circumcision, since whatever goes on in any of the other forms of rites of passage, the transmitted psychological and psychosocial messages are essentially the same.

Before the circumcision rite of passage, boys are prepared to go through the rite of passage by entering into a status called Ndinguri. This status then allows boys who are being initiated to inform and consult the members of their communities about their intentions. The intentionality conveyed to the community is an intention to be an adult. The Tigania people refer to this period as "crying time" (Kuriria). Kuriria is the time between stages within their life cycle. It is a time when the initiates are crying out, claiming their rights to become adults.

During the Kuriria period, the initiates go to the human communities in groups asking permission from elders in order to enter adulthood. The elders and other members of the community normally respond to their request by offering them "gift blessings" (mathaga) in the form of money, chickens or other kinds of domestic animals. The offering of mathaga symbolizes their acceptance for the young to enter into the new status of being.

After the initiates have been accepted by the elders to enter into the status of a new being called Nthaka, they

move onto another stage, wherein the initiates accept each other as equals. A sense of kinship starts developing, where they become brothers to each other. This sense of kinship is carried on even after initiation. After the initiation they call each other wachia ("my brother" or literally "my mother's son").

The completion of this period of servitude is symbolized by acceptance of the candidates for circumcision by Nthakas.²² According to Jeffrey A. Fadiman, this acceptance is celebrated by both the initiates and Nthakas with all participating in a traditional dance called NKibata on the night before the circumcision day.²³

The NKibata dance was extremely essential and popular. This dance normally attracted Nthakas from other neighboring villages and clans. In the NKibata dance, traditional songs were sung. The most popular ones were called Kirarire. The Kirarire were special songs with deep psychological and psychosocial messages of life, stimulating and amusing the community and educating the initiates into the nature of the new status of being in which they are about to enter.

Fadiman posits that kirarire dances "were intended as a form of encouragement to the candidates, warning them of the

²² NThaaka refers to the older initiated persons who are not married.

²³ Jeffrey A. Fadiman, An Oral History of Tribal Warfare: The Meru of Mt. Kenya (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1982), 67.

pain which awaited them in such a manner as to stimulate their courage."²⁴ This was a psychological preparation for the initiates to face and persevere in the challenges of making a transition from childhood to adulthood for this cosmic integration of the self. The Kirarire dance usually continues until dawn the following day. Fadiman points out that at sunrise

each initiate was daubed on the forehead with red ochre by his father, then delivered by the latter to a waiting warrior. By so doing, the parent symbolically reaffirmed his tie with the child one final time, then passed him into the hands of those who would thereafter have full charge of his welfare.²⁵

After the initiate has been ritually and symbolically given over to the Nthaka, they leave the homestead in groups. All the initiates and Nthakas proceed, dancing down to the bank of the river, where the initiates bathe their entire body as a psychological and psychosocial symbol of washing away childhood.

The initiates now leave the river to proceed to the circumcision field. The initiates leaving the river bank and their arrival at the circumcision field call for jubilant chanting from the spectators. At this time, each initiate has his own sponsor (Mutiri), who has been appointed to support him and be on his side, as he courageously awaits for the circumcisor (Mutani) who usually

²⁴ Fadiman, 67-68.

²⁵ Fadiman, 69.

appears a few minutes after all initiates have been assembled together.

The operation begins when the Mutani approaches the first candidate as he cuts one side of the prepuce making an opening through which the glans of the penis is pushed through leaving the small tassel of skin (Ndigi) hanging below the base of the glans. This operation, in most cases, only lasts for about five to seven minutes after which there is applause from the Nthakas. Each applause signals the completion of each candidate, the women spectators pick up the applause with great joy and spread it to the rest of the spectators who are in the field and in the communities beyond. Mbiti says,

The cutting of skin from the sexual organs symbolizes and dramatizes separation from childhood: it is parallel to the cutting of the umbilical cord when the child is born. The sexual organ attaches the child to the state of ignorance, the state of inactivity and the state of potential impotence (asexuality). But once that link is severed, the young person is freed from the state of ignorance and inactivity. He is born into another state, which is the stage of knowledge, of activity, of reproduction.²⁶

After all candidates have been circumcised, the final segment of a new status of being is still to be enthusiastically reached. This is called the status of new born initiate (Ntaane). The Ntaanes are now considered as new born babies into the new status of manhood. This is a new identity which is forming in the life of the initiates.

²⁶ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 123.

Each initiate is escorted from the field of circumcision into a small house called Nyomba ya Ntaane. In this house, the initiates remain for a period of one month as they heal their wounds. The seclusion period is not only a healing period, but it is also a period of psychological and psychosocial preparation. Through instruction, teaching is carried on, explaining more about what it means to be human (Muntu). They are instructed and taught all the secrets of the community and how to live integrated in a corporate community. They learn how to be Muntu (human being) in the eco-community.

The end of the seclusion period is marked by a great celebration of acceptance of the Ntaane into the new status of manhood. This is a time of joy and celebration which is accompanied by the naming ritual. The naming ritual involves the Ntaanes abandoning their surname, which connected them with childhood, into a new name which binds them not only to the living elders and the community, but also to the spirit of the living dead (ancestors), the unborn, the spirit and celestial world. There is a mystically dynamic, psychological and psychosocial binding that takes place as the Ntaane gets a new name and enters into the eco-community.

In normal circumstances, the names which are given to Ntaane(s) reflect the nature and the personality of the father of the Ntaane. For instance, if the father was a

wealthy man, his son would be called M'inoti (wealth man). The prefix M' which begins the name refers to that mystical dynamic psychological and psychosocial union with all the members of the eco-community. The prefix M' etymologically comes from the Kimeru Bantu word Muntu (human being) which has the suffix NTU which philosophically and religiously means beings. The NTU is the potential and dynamic power which makes a person a holistic human being. The NTU of a human person is clearly seen in the harmonious interconnectedness in the eco-community. Vincent Mulago describes the eco-community using the muntu concept when he says,

The Muntu world is very extensive but still unified thanks to the relations and interactions between NTU. In this sense, one could speak of a global, cosmic philosophy. The bond is the life of Muntu; to its maintenance and enhancement all the universe, visible and invisible, is summoned to contribute. Everywhere and in all things, there are means of influencing life, and it is important to grasp these and to make their influence beneficent.²⁷

It is this understanding of NTU as a life force that makes the eco-community possible without which life would be individualistic, unbearable, and meaningless. Giving new names to the initiates symbolically, psychologically, psychosocially, and religiously connects the persons with the cosmic eco-community.

²⁷ Vincent Mulago, Un visage africain du christianisme (Paris, 1965), 155, as quoted in Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," 126.

By accepting new names, which unites them with the ancestors and living community, the initiates accept responsibility for upholding the ideals of the eco-community as an integrated muntu.²⁸ The final part of this rite of passage is completed by incorporating and integrating the new adult figures in the life of the eco-community with a ritual called Gituuji. The Gituuji ritual is prepared for the sake of the new adult figures to be incorporated into adulthood by their community and age groups. The ritual is powerful and it seals the bond of acceptance into this new status of being. A bull would be offered by the fathers of the initiates and its meat would be eaten by the age group, Nthakas and community in general. The offering of the bull, by the fathers of the initiates, symbolically helps initiates claim their right to join the new rank of adulthood. The gratification of this right is symbolized by communal acceptance as they all share meat together.

Central Africa

Ndembu of Zambia. Victor Turner describes in a powerful way what goes on among the Ndembu people concerning the initiation circumcision ritual (Mukanda). It is one of the significant rites of passage among the Ndembu people, and the initiation takes place during the cold weather when it is hygienically possible for wounds to heal quickly. Turner points out that the initiates stay in the seclusion

²⁸ Mbogori interview.

for a period of two to three months during which initiation and teaching are carried out. After this seclusion period the initiates are symbolically and communally reborn as adults:

The rites are typical rites de passage in which the novices are reborn as men after a symbolic death. During this period the novices are secluded and finally emerge with new adult names.²⁹

Turner further describes three phases of the circumcision initiation ritual. First the Kwingija (causing to enter), second the Kungula (at the circumcision lodge), third Kwidisha (to take outside).³⁰

Kwingija (causing to enter). Turner says that the ritual of Kwingija has both social, religious, and psychological dimensions. The ritual takes place away from the homestead where all the initiates are gathered in the forest to be prepared to enter their new status. Turner observes that during the ritual, the circumciser normally appears dressed in masks and he only appears when all the initiates have been prepared. This is the most difficult period for the initiates, because they find themselves in between psychological and psychosocial times. They find themselves in the middle of two states of being. The old status of being pinning them to childhood and the new status

²⁹ Victor Turner, The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembo Ritual, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1967), 152.

³⁰ Turner, Forest of Symbols, 187.

of being binding and integrating them to the cosmos.³¹

Kungula (at the circumcision lodge). This is the place where the initiates are kept during which the wound heals. This period is not only a period to heal, but also a period to receive instruction from the sponsors (Atiri in Meru) on matters that pertain to the new status into which they have entered. They receive instructions on matters of sex, collective responsibility, how to respect the cosmos and to honor various age sets within the community.

Kwidisha (the rite to return). Turner describes this period as the period whereby the initiates return from the circumcision lodge (kungula) to their mothers in preparation for the cosmic integration and communal reception.

When they entered the camp site, drums began to thud rapidly and a close throng of mothers advanced on the column, which began to circle around the chikoli tree. At first the mothers wailed, then their mourning turned to songs of rejoicing as each realized that her son was safe and well. It is impossible to describe adequately the ensuing scene of complete, uninhibited jubilation. The guardians ran around in an inner circle, the mothers danced beside them waving scarves, cloths, anything they could lay hands on, while other female relatives and friends made up an outer ring of joyful chanting dancers. The men stood outside the whirl, laughing with pure pleasure.³²

The cosmic integration appearance is culminated on the following day by a communal reception. The reception of the new initiates is usually attended by everybody. People

³¹ Turner, Forest of Symbols, 9452.

³² Turner, Forest of Symbols, 255.

gather even from the neighboring communities. In this communal reception, the initiates dance rhythmically while the crowd drinks ritual beer. After the dancing, the initiates emerge as new integrated beings with a new status of being. This new status of being is symbolized by each one of them getting new names.

The van Gennep Theory of Rites of Passage

Van Gennep describes three phases of rites of passage. He convincingly argues that in every culture there are three phases of rites of passage, namely separation, transition and incorporation. In his observation, he found these three phases have the most common behavior patterns, observed during the rites of passage, in the life cycle of all human beings in all cultures.³³ Table 2 below shows how rituals cross-culturally follow these three sequential stages:

³³ Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffé (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 141.

Table 2
Phases of Rites of Passage

Old status	Transition (liminal or threshold)	New Status New Being
Separation	=====	Incorporation
(Preliminal rites)	Liminality--betwixt and between ordeal community formation, foundational knowledge, attitude behavior necessary for new condition	(Post-liminal rite)

The separation (Preliminal Phase) is the first movement of rites of passage. In this first phase, the initiates who are in the process of being moved into the new status of adulthood, and are symbolically and geographically dislocated and separated from the old state of life and go to another geographical location. This process of separation is observed in all cultures of the world, however, the period and the nature of separation vary from one culture to another. In some cultures, as we have seen (among Tiganias and Ndembus), it may take days, weeks or even months. This withdrawal or separation is accompanied by extensive training, performed by old professional men and women in the areas of concern, into the responsibilities that pertain to the new status such as care for the mother earth, children, animals and trees.

The second phase of the rites of passage is the

transitional phase (Liminal or threshold). During this second phase, the initiates find themselves in a state which Gwen Neville calls "flux betwixt."³⁴ In the state of "flux betwixt," the initiates feel they are being torn at the middle. They feel like they belong neither to the state of childhood nor to the state of adulthood. Fortunately, in some societies, this threshold period does not take a long time to be completed. It takes one to two hours. During this threshold period, incantations are recited by the officiate, in the form of vows. Some vows are recited back by the initiates in public which signify their free will, allowing the initiates to enter into the new status of being.

Incorporation (Post liminal phase) is the third phase of rites of passage where the initiates are formally received as new beings with a new status in the eco-community. This is accompanied with great celebration as the community integrates the new adults into the cosmos. After the communal reception, the initiates are welcomed into their new status with gifts symbolizing cosmic integration of the self into the eco-community. The members of the community extend their welcome by a hand shake. The spirit of the reception is one of joy and happiness. This indeed is the climax and the highlight of the rites of

³⁴ Gwen Neville, Learning Through Liturgy (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 61.

passage as initiates emerge as new beings.

The Eriksonian Theory of Transition from Childhood
to Adulthood in Relation to Bantu Concepts

In Bantu African communities, there are various psychological and psychosocial changes that take place in the life of a young person. These changes, making a transition from childhood to adulthood, are seen in the community's ability to assist a young person to establish a meaningful relationship within the eco-community. The community is involved in the process of making and assisting its youngsters to become human beings (antu).

Likewise, Erikson emphasizes the community participation in the process of assisting the young persons in this process of becoming, emphasizing the meaning of psychosocial involvement in this process. For him, the young person's ability to establish a meaningful relationship with the "external world" are the marks of adulthood. However, Erikson's use of the term external world is unsatisfactory when viewed from Bantu African communities. It suggests there is an external world, divorced from the self and hence outside the self. The term eco-community (mwiriga) points to that world which is both the internal and external self.

For Erikson, the ability of young persons to establish a meaningful healthful relationship with the external world

marks the end of what he calls "childhood proper."³⁵ Erikson further posits that the ending of childhood proper, opens another chapter in the life cycle. At this time, young persons are not only faced with the crisis of psychological changes, but also with a psychosocial crisis which calls for integration of their societal roles and expectations.³⁶ The healthy transition, from childhood to adulthood, occurs through a gradual integration. This integration is referred to as "ego synthesis."³⁷ The "ego identity," then, develops out of a gradual integration of the self to society.³⁸ The ego identity becomes the signal of psychological and psychosocial change from which the transition of childhood to adulthood is seen and experienced by the whole community.³⁹

Erikson identifies three successive stages of ego development, and each healthy stage involves a clear resolution of each crisis. The first of these stages, which often occurs in the late teens, is the crisis--between identity diffusion and ego identity. At this stage, young persons are not only faced with serious physiological,

³⁵ Erik Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle (1959; reprint, New York: International University Press, 1980), 94.

³⁶ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 94.

³⁷ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 94.

³⁸ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 95.

³⁹ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 96.

revolutional growth issues, but also psychosocial revolutionary issues as they attempt to consolidate social roles. How they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others, becomes their primary focus in the integration process as they develop their appropriate ego identity. Proper healthy integration of the self with the cosmos results in resolution of the crisis, hence leading to a gradual transition into adulthood. Unsuccessful efforts to develop ego identity into adulthood result in what Erikson calls "identity diffusion."⁴⁰ Erikson posits that "the danger of this stage is role confusion. Where this is based on a strong previous doubt as to one's sexual identity, delinquent and outright psychotic episodes are not uncommon."⁴¹

The second of these stages, often occurring in early adulthood, is the crisis--between isolation and intimacy. At this stage of a life cycle, Erikson argues that young persons begin to look for a more intimate support system beyond the already existing social system such as the family. They usually search for a more intimate support system with the opposite sex. At this time, they are sure about themselves. Erikson explains this further:

when childhood and youth come to an end, life, so the saying goes, begins: by which we mean work or

⁴⁰ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 97.

⁴¹ Erik H. Erikson, Childhood and Society, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 262.

study for a specified career, sociability with the other sex, and in time, marriage and a family of one's own. But it is only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established that real intimacy with the other sex (or for that matter, with any other person or even with oneself) is possible.⁴²

Among the Tiganias of Kenya, the initiation is the focus of existence. It is a point where the members of the eco-community meet the departed, the living and those yet to be born. In the initiation drama, everybody in the eco-community becomes an actor or actress.

For Erikson, a successful resolution of this crisis suggests maturity, hence adulthood has been achieved. The psychoanalytic tradition had emphasized genitality as one of the chief signs of a wholeness. "Psychoanalysis" Erikson says, "has emphasized genitality as one of the chief signs of a healthy personality. Genitality [he explains is the potential capacity to develop orgasmic potency in relation to a loved partner of the opposite sex."⁴³ Erikson posits that inability to develop in those directions leads to isolation and to a state of diffusion.

The third of these stages, often occurring in adulthood, is the crisis--between stagnation and generativity. At this stage, there is an overwhelming desire to care for the offspring(s). "Generativity is primarily the interest in establishing and guiding the next

⁴² Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 100-01.

⁴³ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 102.

generation."⁴⁴ In traditional life, sexual union was incomprehensible without the dimensions of multiplication of life through procreation. Newborn babies were seen as an extension of an ontological future. They were viewed as living symbols of ontological unity that exists between the living and the living dead. The presence of a newborn in the community was a symbol of a continuous becomingness of NTU in the ecological community. The mother is seen as an agent symbol of this ontological cosmic universal life force. The emphasis on generativity, therefore, underscores the importance of the process of becoming in the Bantu African context. Stagnation among the Tigania people of Kenya is seen in the light of barrenness or inability to beget children, a situation that calls for community concern. This concern is not only psychological and psychosocial, but also ontological. In Tigania, the birth of a child is not only a concern of the parents, but also of the eco-community; where a child cannot be an individual person's--"child"--but only a community child (our child). According to Erikson, those who develop in the direction of generativity achieve a healthy personality.

This chapter has attempted to show how rites of passage play a central role in transmitting psychological and psychosocial messages of change for a healthy integration of the self to the eco-community.

⁴⁴ Erikson, Identity and the Life Cycle, 97.

As we have seen, human life is like a journey where at every point something new is emerging to be celebrated. As a community or as a group, life involves integration in the process of rebirth and becoming. The rites of passage play a great role for on-going psychosocial change to new thresholds in the life cycle within the eco-community.

Each community has its own acceptable rites of passage to meet the psychosocial needs of that particular community. However, it is unfortunate that most contemporary communities are losing most of their rites of passage, instead of reforming them to meet the needs in our modern sophisticated communities. Rites of passage should be constantly reviewed and reformed by the community to be relevant at every age in space and time.

The challenge for anthropologists, developmental psychologists, sociologists, and theologians should be to assist communities to identify those rites of passage that have outgrown their purpose and to assist the community to reform them so that they will be relevant healing tools in the prevalent generation.

Ritual healing is rooted in the belief that there are powers inherent in the universe, where ancestral spirits and other beings are involved in the healing process, in reestablishing cosmic harmony. The ritualist is equally aware of these personified beings in the universe through which his/her healing functions are performed:

His awareness of the importance of equilibrium, i.e., psychic equilibrium is the driving force behind the performance of rituals and ceremonies. The main aim of these ceremonies is to establish or maintain contact with the ancestors and to restore harmony where previously disharmony or even chaos has reigned.⁴⁵

The therapist, as a ritual healer, is equally a cosmic figure with his/her awareness of this cosmic dimension of his/her profession. It makes his/her sensitive to the meaning of the cosmic environment around him/her. This sensitivity gives him/her the ability to tap into the prevalent cosmic manifestation, at any given moment in therapeutic intervention, to enhance healing:

The healer is constantly sensitive to meaningful manifestations of nature around him. For example, rain on a festive occasion indicates the goodwill of the ancestors; the call of a particular bird can be either a good or a bad omen; the behaviour of wild or domestic animals also conveys messages. There is a constant interaction between nature, the outside world, and his own intrapsychic experiences.⁴⁶

Therefore, among the Xhosa, macrocosm and microcosm are not viewed as if they are opposed to each other in a way that a correlation has to be sought between them. The human body is a microcosm of the universe to an extent that there is a belief that everything was created in one macrocosm and humankind are one. The absence of harmony between macrocosm

⁴⁵ M. Vera Buhrmann, "Nature, Psyche, and a Healing Ceremony for the Xhosa," in A Testament to the Wilderness, ed. C. A. Meier (Santa Monica, Calif.: Lapis Press, 1985), 85.

⁴⁶ Buhrmann, "Nature, Psyche," 85.

and microcosm is what accounts for human illness. This way of looking at the universe calls for a new way of looking into the self in relation to the universe.

Bantu Concepts of Self and the Universe

It is impossible to understand the Bantu psychology of the self and psychopathology, without serious study of the anthropological structure of the sense of self in relation to the eco-community. It becomes impossible, because persons among the Bantu are not a closed system standing out in opposition to the external world. A person cannot be understood in isolation from the larger system, except in close relation to everything that surrounds that individual in "an environment filled with cultural signifiers in a universe that is itself panstructured."⁴⁷ In this panstructured universe, a person can only perceive the self in terms of the whole.

Bantu personhood cannot be a completed system without the communal dimension of selfhood. In this respect selfhood is viewed as a living intercosmic religious system of social interactions. Without this understanding of selfhood it would be impossible to grasp the way in which the Bantu experience the sense of self.

In the past, Western psychology emphasized individual selfhood at the expense of interrelational selfhood. While recognizing that there is that part of ourselves that is

⁴⁷ Sow, 126.

essentially our own (belonging to the self), one must also realize that there is that part of us that does not only belong to ourselves but belongs to the eco-community. The African worldview makes this point clear where a complete wholeness is seen in the light of the communal interrelatedness both to human beings, other beings, and celestial objects. A healthful personality is one where one is able to establish one's meaningful, harmonious, ontological relatedness in the eco-community: as Oosthuizen says, "In traditional African religion, personality receives the highest priority, and personality presupposes relationships."⁴⁸

In Western societies, the degree of maturity is measured by the way in which young persons are able to clearly self differentiate themselves, outgrowing dependency from the "external world." This differentiation is reflected in their ability to make decisions without consulting the "external world" for personal matters. In Africa, the degree of maturity to a healthy personality is measured by the ability to attach and detach, yet remaining part of the whole. Maturity is the ability to be interrelated with both the internal and the external world without jeopardizing "individuality." This is the paradox of the African ontological philosophy of identity, where one

⁴⁸ Oosthuizen, "Place of African Traditional Religion," 41.

sees the "self" in terms of inter-cosmic-relatedness and also sees the "interrelatedness" in terms of the self.

The problems faced by the world today partly emerge from the modern notion of the self which emphasizes an individualistic self or autonomous self as advocated by Western psychology. Feminist works have objected to the concept of an autonomous selfhood. They emphasize the self in relation to other beings in the cosmos. They attempt to bring a balance between the connected self with other beings in the cosmos, while not sacrificing one's personal integrity. The Bantu makes a distinction between individuality and individuation. The former envisions the self that is connected with other life forces in the universe, yet without losing that part of the self that remains personal. The latter, individuation, refers to that sense of the self divorced from the rest of the beings. This is the self that was championed by Newtonian and Cartesian cosmology and magnified by Western individualistic psychology.

The individualistic psychology has been criticized by feminist scholars. For instance, Catherine Keller makes a link of an autonomous self with a patriarchy system which emphasizes the nuclear ego.⁴⁹ Keller argues that women do

⁴⁹ Catherine Keller, "Toward a Post-Patriarchal Post-Modernity," in Spirituality and Society, ed. David R. Griffin (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 73.

not need separateness, but connectedness. In this respect, Keller feels the development of post-modern selfhood would be linked to a relational self.⁵⁰ This feminist dimension of relational selfhood relates to the Bantu notion of cosmic relational selfhood where a healthy self is perceived as constituted by the cosmic relationship within the ecological community.

The Bantu cosmology constitutes an uninterrupted chain of existence, cosmically linking the cosmic relational self with the universe. This cosmic relational self is achieved in the person's progressive process of social integration into the ecological community. This social integrative process also ensures open communication between the microcosmos, mesocosmos and the macrocosmos.⁵¹ Therefore, the evolution of African personhood is understood in a cosmically relational self, where selfhood is understood in terms of "we-ness." Defining the self this way, stands in opposition to Western ways of perceiving the sense of self. In contrast to the Western individualistic understanding of self, the Bantu cosmic relation of self presents a continuous progression from the cosmic to the social, from nature to culture, from the external to the internal, from the formless to the formed, from the empty to the full, from

⁵⁰ Keller, "Toward a Post-Patriarchal Post-Modernity," 73.

⁵¹ Sow, 140.

non-recognized to the recognized, from meaningless to the meaningful, from non-being to being.

In this cosmic relational self, a child becomes (muntu) within the process of a cosmic interaction. A child becomes muntu in relation to others and for others. This process of becoming muntu is a cosmic hypopsycholization and cosmic hyperculturalization, where the child's whole attitude about life is geared towards this cosmic relational personhood.

To become muntu, in the Bantu ecological community, is a process that takes three cosmic dimensions. These three dimensions are biolineal, horizontal and vertical dimensions. The biolineal dimension deals with the social integration of the child during the birth process, where the child is incorporated into the life of the eco-community as a full participant. The horizontal dimension deals with the integration of the person into the eco-community through an initiation process. In the rites of passage, a person is integrated into the eco-community to live in cosmic solidarity with other beings in the cosmos. The vertical dimension deals with the person's integration into the world of the living dead and the divinities.⁵²

To be muntu, therefore, is to be in cosmic relationship with other beings in the universe. Any sense of disconnection from this cosmic solidarity would be to lose the umuntu (humanhood). The Tigania people for example,

⁵² Sow, 145-46.

describe this state of dehumanized self as a state of being a Ncege--a dehumanized selfhood.⁵³

Therefore, among the Bantu people, primary symbolism is always a latent presence of this bond, where a person does not need to perceive oneself as an isolated atom, since "no relationship has any meaning except within a system of more fundamental ties to near kin and others."⁵⁴

The Bantu also experience the sense of self in relation to their creator God (Murungu) who is conceived as the ground of all selfhood. The cosmic relational self is conceptualized in terms of we-ness as opposed to the Western I-ness. This sense of selfhood is composed of its cosmic relationships in the whole eco-system. The cosmic relational selfhood, grounded in God's selfhood, interchangeably makes an impact on other selfhoods in the eco-system in the degree that there is a deep ontic selfhood. Tillich captures this Bantu understanding of selfhood, when he states that

No individual exists without participation, and no personal being exists without communal being. The person as the fully developed individual self is impossible without other fully developed selves.⁵⁵

To be a human being is to be anchored in intercosmic relationships in the universe. It is in this relationship

⁵³ Mbogori interview.

⁵⁴ Sow, 156.

⁵⁵ Tillich, Systematic Theology, 1: 176.

where one can experience wholeness. J. H. Oldham says,

The isolated individual self is an abstraction. We become persons only in and through our relations with other persons. The individual self has no independent existence which gives it the power to enter into relationships with other selves. Only through living intercourse with other selves can it become a self at all.⁵⁶

A neurosis from this understanding of selfhood would be cosmically divided selfhood. Cosmically divided selfhood will also be intrapsychically divided, because no individual can exist in isolation from other cosmic beings.

Jung, in depth psychology, saw this broader sense of selfhood. Jung's contact with African peoples (especially Kenyan and Ugandans) probably broadened his perspective of selfhood to include cosmic selves.

There [Kenya] the cosmic meaning of consciousness became over-whelmingly clear to me. "What nature leaves imperfect, the art perfects," say the alchemists. Man [sic], I, in an invisible act of creation put the stamp of perfection on the world by giving it objective existence. This act we usually ascribe to the creator alone, without considering that in so doing we view life as a machine calculated down to the last detail, which, along with the human psyche, runs on senselessly, obeying foreknown and predetermined rules.⁵⁷

Jung, using this broader sense of selfhood, says "Neurosis

⁵⁶ J. H. Oldham, The Times, 5 October 1933, quoted in Taylor, 65.

⁵⁷ Carl Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffe. Trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (1963; reprint, New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 255-56.

is self division."⁵⁸ Jung even saw the divided selfhood as the root cause of human illness, and viewed the self as an open system, incorporating other selves into itself. Jung viewed this to the degree that the structure of self becomes relational to the whole basic structure to which all other selves are related to the collective unconscious.

This solidarity of personhood is experienced in life within the extended family in the eco-community. "This is the context" Taylor writes, "in which an African learns to say, I am because I participate. To him the individual is always an abstraction; man is a family."⁵⁹

J. C. Carothers contrasts the Western view of personhood and the African view:

Modern Western culture, with its insistence on an individual self-sufficiency which implies the constant need for personal choice and personal decision--the application of general principles to particular situations--is quite a recent thing and dates only from the Protestant and the later Industrial Revolutions. It is far more strange in human history than are the African cultural modes, and carries many risks.⁶⁰

To be muntu is to have an ability to live in a cosmically harmonious relationship with other life forces in

⁵⁸ Carl Jung, Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, vol. 7 of The Collected Works of C. G. Jung (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), par. 327.

⁵⁹ Taylor, 93.

⁶⁰ J. C. Carothers, The African Mind in Health and Disease: A Study in Ethno Psychiatry, WHO Monograph, no. 17 [1953] (New York: Negro University Press, 1970), 151-52, cited in Taylor, 93.

the universe, where individualism is seen as a negation of selfhood and hence personhood. To be muntu, is to live like Jesus who gave his own life for the sake of his friends, because his existence had to touch the existence of others. Among the Bantu people of Malawi, when one asks for a gift one says Give me also. At the level of mental imagery, one cannot perceive having to be a recipient of something alone, without another involved in receiving, as well. Similarly, among the Meru, it is reported that a group of Tiganian young men went to request their employers to slash their pay, as well, after realizing one of their colleagues had his pay slashed. This way of viewing life gives no room for the antonomous self or individualism:

The price of this communal security is an unconditional readiness to share, and a complete surrender of individualism. Often a tiny child may be presented with some tit-bit of food only to have it snatched away and given to an older person in order to teach this lesson.⁶¹

In most cases, a child who refused to share food would have his food snatched away and given to another person in order to learn the lesson of communal sharing.

The Bantu defines the self as cognatus ergo sum (I belong therefore I am) as opposed to the Western Cartesian individualistic dictum cogito ergo sum (I think therefore I am).

It is the ability of belonging and participating in the

⁶¹ Taylor, 95.

eco-community that one's selfhood emerges in the Bantu understanding of the personhood. This is in contrast to Western thought where the thought of human beings begins with the individual instead of community. A person in Western individualistic society is seen as monad who is self contained and self governing as a completely independent unit. Among the Bantu, the community exists with greater force than the individual, and it is from the community where the person draws life, develops his/her personhood and finally establishes his/her communal identity.⁶² This identity is essential for communal living in the eco-community.

It is this conception of selfhood that makes a sharp distinction between the Bantu and the Western understanding of selfhood. The Bantu understanding of self is in tune with the eastern understanding of the cosmic relational self, whereas in Western individualistic traditions, the self is ego, an independent entity and potential controller of a world. The eastern tradition calls for harmony with

⁶² Jeremiah M'Ituerandu notes that due to modernization there is a shift from the community to the individual. He laments this cultural erosion, "Nitwewegerere Kinya thaabu tukiegera nyomba" [We swept even gold when we swept the house]. M'Ituerandu, commonly known as Kaminchuria Metho, is a respected Methodist and also regarded as a custodian of Meru tradition. He is a teacher who has taught many. His dedication as a teacher has earned him the name "Kaminchuria Metho" which means "One Who Opens People Their Eyes to See." (Interview by author.)

nature rather than use and control of the natural order.⁶³

Tempels captures the Bantu understanding of what constitutes being a Muntu. For him

The living "muntu" is in relation of being to being with God, with his [sic] clan brethren, with his [sic] family and with his [sic] descendants. He [sic] is in a similar ontological relationship with his [sic] patrimony, his [sic] land, with all that it contains or produces, with all that grows or lives on it. All acquisitions brings an increase of vital force in the Bantu eyes: everything which breaks in this patrimony, causes it to deteriorate, or destroys it. That is to say, everything which brings injury to that which constitutes his vital force constitutes a diminution of the 'Muntu' in himself of the muntu in his very essence, which on that account will die Kufwa [kufa], in the sense that we made clear above.⁶⁴

Among the Meru, being a muntu is to be ontologically connected in the web of existence--and when someone is said not to be muntu (Ti muntu) it means there is an imbalance in the cosmic ontology leading to a state of dehumanized selfhood.

In contrast to the Bantu, Western individualistic society is more inclined toward an internal locus of control that champions individualism, all of which developed during the Enlightenment. Individualism stresses doing over being, action over reflection, and duties are defined in reference to one's own goals instead of reference to the community.

The worth of a person is measured by individual

⁶³ David W. Augsburger, Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 85.

⁶⁴ Tempels, 100-01.

achievement or material possession, instead of communal achievement. David Augsburger affirms the following distinction between the eastern and Western socialization process:

Western society socializes the person by pressing for a crisis formation of individual identity leading to autonomy, privatism, and asserting one's own rights, other cultures socialize for dependent collaboration, familial identity, personal responsibility to the group, collective solidarity, and submission of individual rights to the harmonious interaction of the larger whole.⁶⁵

The Biblical view of selfhood is multidimensional in the sense that it is inclusive and not reductionistic. Human beings are presented as possessing the Imago Dei, which has been misunderstood as uniqueness above other beings. The imago dei in humanity presupposes relatedness and not separateness. It is a call for a responsible co-humanity with other beings, "not in our autonomy but in our responsive co-existence before God."⁶⁶ Humanity cannot be perceived in the Bantu ontology without this cosmic self-relatedness.

⁶⁵ Edward C. Stewart, J. Danielian, and R. J. Festes, "Stimulating Intercultural Communication Through Role Playing," Human Resources Research Organization, Alexandria, Va., 1969, as cited in Augsburger, 100.

⁶⁶ Augsburger, 108.

Chapter 5
 Concepts of Illness and Well-being
 in Relation to Counseling
Bantu Views of Illness and Well-being

The task of this chapter is to establish the distinctive methodological difference between a cosmocentric approach and an individual-centered approach to pastoral psychotherapy with a view of pointing out how a cosmocentric approach emerges out of a particular cultural context. The chapter also attempts to show how a cosmocentric model is a valid holistic approach in dealing with therapeutic issues emerging from a panstructured universe. In this regard, a cosmocentric approach is brought into dialogue with the client-centered approach of Carl Rogers. The chapter opens by examining the difference between the concept of illness and well-being. This difference calls for a new approach to achieve wholeness.

Most of the psychoanalytic traditions have defined illness in terms of a malfunctioning of the intrapsychic systems capturing the Newtonian mechanistic cosmology. John A. Sanford, for example, defines illness from this mechanistic cosmology by saying that:

Illness is something that results in a malfunctioning of the consciousness. The center of consciousness is ego, the "I" part of us that does the willing, suffering, choosing in life; the part of us of which we are most immediately aware.

If this part of us is not able to function it would seem that we are ill. So this definition of illness seems to fit.¹

This understanding of illness is problematic for the Bantu because it does not include cosmic dimensions of illness and well-being and this discrepancy makes it incomplete.

The World Health Organization's description of mental health is much closer to the Bantu view of what constitutes illness and well-being. The World Health Organization sees mental health in terms of an ontological unity between the individual and social systems. Hence mental illness is viewed as the disconnection of a person from the social system which gives that individual person a sense of wholeness:

"Mental health," according to the World Health Organization, "is the capacity of an individual [sic] to form harmonious relationships with others and to participate in or contribute constructively to changes in the social environment."²

For the Bantu people, the social solidarity of persons within the eco-community is a key for the health of an individual person and to the enhancement of harmony between that person and inter-cosmic relationships. T. A. Lambo says,

Concepts of [mental] health within the framework of African culture are far more social than biological. In the mind of the African, there is more unitary concept of psychosomatic

¹ John A. Sanford, Healing and Wholeness (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 5.

² Augsburger, 319.

interrelationship; that is, an apparent reciprocity between mind and matter. Health is not an isolated phenomenon but part of the entire magico-religious fabric; it is more than the absence of disease.³

A Zulu medical practitioner revealed the ignorance of Western individualistic medical science when applied to Zulu Bantu: "Whites [sic] have failed to see that in Africa a human being is an entity--not divided up into various sections such as the physical body, the soul and the spirit. When a Zulu is sick it is the whole man [sic] that is sick."⁴

It is unfortunate that the term health has been used out of context by the Western mental health givers. David Bohm explains the root meaning of the term health from its original meaning when he says,

It is instructive to consider that the word health in English is based on an Anglo-saxon word hale meaning whole; that is, to be healthy is to be whole, which is, I think, roughly the equivalent of the Hebrew Shalom. Likewise the English 'holy' is based on the same root as whole. All of this indicates that man has sensed always that wholeness or integrity is an absolute necessity to make life worth living. Yet over the ages, he [sic] has generally lived in fragmentation.⁵

In the African traditional religion, one of its primary

³ T. A. Lambo, "Patterns of Psychiatric Care in Developing African Countries," in Magic, Faith and Healing, ed. Ari Kiev (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 446. Quoted in Augsburger, 319-20.

⁴ M. Vera Buhrmann, Living in Two Worlds: Communication Between a White Healer and Her Black Counterparts (Cape Town: Hollman and Rousseau, 1984), 32.

⁵ Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, 3.

concerns is holistic mental health. This concern is a search for cosmic wholeness.

This search is not simply that of the individual, but also that of the community. The individual cannot achieve [mental] health alone, but only as a properly functioning member of a community. The sickness of an individual is a symptom of a deeper communal malaise. To deal with the symptom is at most of temporary benefit; real healing requires the re-establishment of right-relationships. This is the concern of the diviner and doctor or "medicine man."⁶

The attempt by mental health professionals is to establish cosmic harmony. Cosmic equilibrium has to be maintained in the eco-community. For well being to be achieved, cosmic equilibrium is believed to be what would constitute wellness. Therefore, cosmic disequilibrium is equally believed to be the root cause of trouble such as illness and other misfortunes. The goal to wholeness is to maintain a cosmic harmony between macrocosm (world) and microcosm (self) in the ecological community.

Cosmic equilibrium is maintained between the living and the living-dead, between the living and ancestral spirit, between the living and the biosphere. For mental health to be experienced, a good relationship through constant interaction and communication between beings is necessary. This equilibrium has to be maintained. If there is a breakdown, disequilibrium is the outcome. This

⁶ Newell S. Booth, Jr., "Tradition and Community in African Religion," Journal of Religion in Africa 9, fasc. 2 (1978): 91.

disequilibrium results in mental illness, unhappiness and misfortune.⁷ The breakdown of the cosmic equilibrium occurs when the cosmic universal life force NTU is disrupted from its ontological place. This is the focal point where everything else is held together in a cosmic web of existence. It is this cosmic dimension of equilibrium which is lacking in Western healing methodology, and hence unable to penetrate the Bantu ontological system. The distinction between Western methodology is that, while the Western methodology treats a client from an individual's internal frame of reference, the Bantu methodology treats client's from a eco-community's frame of reference.

Therapeutic Conflict Between Western Individualistic

Psychotherapy and the Bantu

Most of Western individualistic psychotherapeutic systems tend to emphasize the intrapsychic factors during childhood as the primary cause of the problem people experience in the present other than cosmic factors. In this case, people become mentally or emotionally ill because of what their parents or primary care givers did to them in childhood. In such circumstances, the therapeutic aim is geared towards helping the person to be in touch with the past to intrapsychically unravel negative experiences from childhood through the self discovery process. Here the

⁷ Buhrmann, "Nature, Psyche and a Healing Ceremony," 77.

client's problem is conceptualized in terms of childhood adjustment through a self discovery process.

In contrast, the Bantu do not exclusively see the root of the problem from the intrapsychic perspective. They see the root of the present problem also as systemic and cosmic in nature. While the Bantu therapeutic system is inclined to perceive mental health from a cosmic and systemic perspective, Western individualistic psychotherapeutic systems tend to view mental health as a symptom that exists intrapsychically and independently from the cosmic forces. This exclusive intrapsychic model is limited and problematic when applied to the Bantu. John Taylor describes the Bantu concept of mental wellness and illness when he says,

A man's [sic] well-being consists, rather, in keeping in harmony with the cosmic totality. When things go well with him he knows he is at peace, and of a piece, with the scheme of things, and there can be no greater good than that. If things go wrong then somewhere he has fallen out of step. He feels lost. The totality has become hostile and, if he has a run of bad luck he falls prey to acute insecurity and anxiety. The whole system of divination exists to help him discover the point at which the harmony has been broken and how it may be restored.⁸

In this respect, the Bantu people view mental illness as a signal which indicates that a person is experiencing disequilibrium in the eco-community. Mental illness is therefore seen as a signal to indicate that there is cosmic disequilibrium within the web of existence. This view of

⁸ Taylor, 74-75.

mental illness calls for reestablishment of the order in the disturbed cosmic system by determining the disconnected cosmic network in order to restore a shattered order.⁹ To restore the shattered order involves reintegrating the distressed person to the ontological wheel of existence by restoration of the disturbed NTU to its ontologically relational cosmic existence. The restoration of NTU reestablishes an ontologically broken relationship between the self and the universe, ensuring an ecologically coherent harmony of the psycho-universe which is ontologically interwoven with the social universe. Ibrahim Sow points to this cosmic wholeness:

In Africa, mental illness and its treatment fall within specific frames of reference, because the basic structure of the individual and the organization of the personality that flows therefrom have their own cultural characteristics (see I. Sow, 1977) that differ from what we are familiar with, practically and theoretically, concerning the concept of person and the organization of personality in the West. Mental illness is a disorder, to be sure, but that disorder, perceived as such in all traditional societies, is thought of and acted on its terms of "order," in an articulated series of significant sequences aimed at reestablishing communication with the world of the signified. In this sense, the patient (because of the disorder of his problems) provides a perfect opportunity for a diagnosis of the consistency of community's ties with fundamental group values.¹⁰

This synthetic dimension of healing, which is reflected in the traditional method of healing, has been brought to

⁹ Sow, 45.

¹⁰ Sow, 47-48.

light by African universities which have been involved in bridging the gap between the traditional healing method and the contemporary modern method. The following African universities have been in the forefront in conducting research to this effect: Dakar, Abidjan, Ibadan and Kinshasa.

From different researches conducted in these universities, it has been identified that cosmic treatment is always etiological. For most of the distressed persons, emotional and mental disturbances have a cosmic mutual cause derived from social and spiritual realms of reality. It is observed that discovering the cosmic dimensions of illness is crucial to reestablishing the broken cosmic harmony within the psycho-universe.¹¹

The therapeutic focus is not only directed to the identified "patient," but to the cosmic system from which the situation has emerged. Therefore, the patient is not the only one to be affected by therapeutic order, but the whole cosmic system also benefits without such a healing restoration of the ontological equilibrium would be impossible.

Among Bantu traditional healing, the mutual cosmic cause and meaning of illness plays a great role in reestablishment of the disrupted cosmic equilibrium within the eco-community. Mutual cosmic cause and meaning tends to

¹¹ Sow, 49-50.

capture more attention than the symptom, whereas in Western individualistic psychotherapy, by contrast, the symptom plays a great role towards diagnosis and treatment. The Bantu's focus on cosmic mutual cause is more in tune to the Bantu synthetic view of the universe, while the Western individualistic symptomatic approach is more in tune with the Western dualistic view of the universe. For the Bantus, to be whole is more than the absence of disease. This understanding of traditional healing is rooted in what Sow calls traditional nosology, which is based on indigenous African clinical realities that have been ignored; and yet these realities have been found to be essential in understanding the nature of illness among the African peoples.¹²

When dealing with Bantu diagnosis and treatment, one should take into account the cosmic mutual cause and its meaning--because there are cosmic mutual causes in Bantu healing psychology:

As we can observe in the field, what is of greatest interest to African patient from the very beginning and above anything else is the [mutual] cause or, more importantly, the meaning of his [sic] illness, since it is felt to be a misfortune--indeed, much more interesting than the syndromic, even significant, pattern of some objective morbid structure that would be extraneous to him [sic].¹³

How then can we understand psychopathology among the Bantus?

¹² Sow, 51.

¹³ Sow, 51.

Psychopathology cannot be understood in isolation from the cosmic and communal dimension of psychopathology, because an individual is seen as part of the whole. An individual psychopathology would thus be seen as a pathology of the whole cosmic system that has only surfaced in the life of an individual person. That is the reason why individual nosographic categories that do not deal with communal psychology would be ineffective with the Bantu people.¹⁴

Unfortunately, Western individual psychotherapeutic methodologies of healing have dominated the mental health delivery system in many African communities. These methodologies have given less attention to what traditional psychotherapy have had to offer in eliminating the disturbances that are rooted in the cosmic realms of reality. As a result of this, it is observed that most African peoples continue to seek therapeutic consultation with traditional therapists while still seeing a Western trained psychotherapist. This phenomenon suggests that there is an area which is not addressed by individualistic oriented psychotherapy. This unaddressed area is rooted in the Bantu view of the universe. For the cycle of wholeness to be completed, clients have been seen consulting traditional therapists whose training integrates the cosmic ontological harmony in the holistic universe. Sow has observed this fact:

¹⁴ Sow, 52.

It is estimated that about 90% of the population continues to seek their [mental] services, along with--or independently from--those of modern medicine. A doctor [psychotherapist] working in a modern hospital center or dispensary soon learns from everyday experience that the large majority of his patients, even while he is treating them, continues to receive, at the same time, treatment by traditional [therapeutic] methods.¹⁵

We must ask ourselves: what is it that is missing in Western methodology which traditional therapies are capable of offering? The major conclusions can be drawn. First, Western individualistic therapeutic methodologies tend to be foreign to African cosmology, and therefore incapable of addressing Bantu therapeutic needs. Western individualistic methodologies tend to be rooted in the mechanistic, deterministic Western worldview and thus are unable to provide the holistic healing in the context of a universe.

Second, Western individualistic therapeutic methodologies tend to be divorced from the religious spiritual dimensions of human personality. This renders the Western views incapable of penetrating the Bantu religious universe.¹⁶ Oosthuizen further observes that:

While Western medicine [healing] has become divorced from religion, and a split has taken place in treating the body, mind, and soul by the physician, psychiatrist and priest, respectively, and the social worker has been concentrating on

¹⁵ Sow, 58.

¹⁶ See Harriet Ngubane, Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine: An Ethnography of Health and Disease in Nyuswa-Zulu Thought and Practice (London: Academic Press, 1977), 28; and John Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion (London: Heinemann, 1975), 134, as quoted in Oosthuizen, 46-47.

the social problems, the diviner relates to all these issues as a trusted person in the community. Religion remains of major significance in healing procedures among Africans in South Africa, especially among the traditionalists, those from the independent/indigenous churches with their prayers healers/prophets (offices which are replacements for the diviners), and to a large extent among those from the established churches.¹⁷

Third, the Bantu traditional approach to holistic healing has much to contribute to post-modern healing. In holistic healing, human beings are not dehumanized by separating their personality, but are cosmically connected to the cosmic universal life force (the NTU) in the healing process. The future of therapy should capture that vision of healing, where the cosmos is seen as the platform of restoration of wellness, for all beings in the universe. Oosthuizen calls for this vision of cosmic wholeness and points out that it could be a great contribution to post-modern healing in the restoration of true humanity and personhood.¹⁸

Rogers' Therapeutic System in Dialogue With the Bantu Therapeutic System: A Case Study

The task of this subsection is to open a therapeutic dialogue between Karl Rogers' therapeutic system, and the Bantu therapeutic system, by examining the failures and contributions the Rogerian model of therapy might make to

¹⁷ Oosthuizen, 47-48.

¹⁸ Oosthuizen, 49.

the Bantu cultural context.

Before we examine the above issues, it might be helpful/useful to outline Rogers' theory of personality and change, in relation to his therapeutic system. Unlike Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Rogers' client-centered model holds an optimistic view of human personality. This very client-centered attitude of human personality allows Rogers' therapeutic systems to focus more on the "present" than the "past" experiences of the client. Rogers holds that behavioral change is affected from within the individual's internal frame of reference.

C. R. Ridley briefly outlines for us Rogers' theory of personality, by saying,

Rogers's theory of personality assumes that (1) human beings are experiencing beings; (2) behavior can be understood only from a person's internal frame of reference; (3) the value of life resides in the present; (4) humans are innately good and trustworthy; (5) humans tend towards self-actualization; (6) deep relationships are a basic human need; (7) growth occurs through self-discovery; (8) people do the best thing possible when given the right conditions; and (9) the theory applies to all people.¹⁹

Some of the above issues will serve as the basis for our inquiry. Rogers offers a statement that explains his theory of client-centered therapy:

The theory of client-centered therapy hypothesizes that the inner changes taking place in therapy

¹⁹ Charles R. Ridley, "Client-Centered Therapy," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling, ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 176.

will cause the individual after therapy to behave in ways which are less defensive, more socialized, more acceptant of reality in himself and in his social environment, and which give evidence of a more socialized system of values. He will, in short, behave in ways which are regarded as more mature, and infantile ways of behaving will tend to decrease.²⁰

Rogers' system was the first United States psychotherapeutic system that achieved wide prominence. In his time, Rogers' ideas and methods have had a significant influence upon education, industry and pastoral psychology in the United States, in addition to counseling and therapy. Rogers' views flourished even though it had its own inadequacies as reflected in Howard Clinebell's personal testimony:

My first training in pastoral counseling was Rogerian in its orientation. I had more than two years of valuable therapy with a person whose methods were mainly client-centered. However, in retrospect, I now see that my growth could have been furthered much more rapidly if that therapist had been trained in more active and confrontational methods.²¹

Even though the Rogerian model of therapy might encounter some social and cultural difficulties when applied to the Bantu, his therapeutic system has some dimensions that relate and could contribute to counseling and therapy in the Bantu African cultural context. The following is a summary of the major areas in which his theory might make a contribution: (1) Rogers' approach to responsive listening

²⁰ Karl Rogers, On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 259.

²¹ Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 115.

in a therapeutic process; (2) Rogers' phenomenological approach to counseling and therapy; and (3) Rogers' notion of the place of the therapist in the therapeutic process.

First, Rogers' approach to counseling and therapy opens a new way of doing therapy in a therapeutic setting. His particular emphasis on responsive listening, and the therapist's unconditional acceptance of the client, relates to the Bantu therapeutic unconditional acceptance of all beings which would be a remarkable affirmation in a therapeutic Bantu cultural setting. Also, his nonjudgmental responsive awareness of the client's emotional pain in a therapeutic relationship, provides a mutual awareness through which healing and growth occurs in the therapeutic process.²² Furthermore, Rogers' notion of a client's becomingness, within the therapeutic process relates to the depth and magnitude of the Bantu experience of becomingness. Among the Bantus, beings are constantly in the process of becoming in the life cycle. For the Bantus, becoming human is always a ritualistic process that begins long before birth and continues both in the life span and even after physical death throughout the state of collective immortality.²³ Even though Rogers has no notion of this ritualistic extension of a life span (through which one

²² Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 35.

²³ Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 26.

continues to become²⁴) his reflection on this notion of becomingness remains significant when viewed from the Bantu therapeutic arena.

Second, Rogers' phenomenological approach in his theoretical therapeutic system, relates to the Bantu's view of the universe as a recognizable force which influences a person's behavior. He held that one's behavior is determined by one's internal world. His approach, however, would strengthen the already existing Bantu therapeutic approach. Nevertheless, Rogers' description of the phenomenological approach differs from the Bantu. This is evident because the Bantu universe is full of beings--which are capable of influencing other beings and at the same time being influenced by--other beings in the universe. Rogers' approach values each person's unique phenomenal experience and each person's internal world determines his or her behavior. This exclusive view of a phenomenological approach would be problematic to the Bantu's approach. The Bantu approach is an interactive system of experiences in the psycho-universe.

Third, Rogers' use of the midwifery metaphor, in explaining the role of a therapist in a therapeutic process, could contribute to the Bantu's understanding of the role of a therapist. This is significant, because the role of a therapist in a traditional Bantu therapeutic system, is very

²⁴ Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 196.

powerful and structured. The Rogerian view could balance and encourage a distribution of the power, which is essential in the therapeutic process between the therapist and client. However, Rogers' explanation of the midwife metaphor still portrays an image of a very passive therapist. Clinebell reflects on this passiveness as a weakness, when stating:

The exclusive use of Rogers midwifery model does not allow the therapist to develop the differential methodology that is essential in responding to the need of persons who require more active, structured educative approaches.²⁵

However, even though Rogers fails to clearly outline what a midwife would do in the natural childbirth process, the metaphor still remains helpful and powerful. This is especially true when viewed from the Bantu African context, where a power balance is needed between the client and the therapist.

While Rogers' earlier work, such as Client Centered Therapy, displayed an exclusive intrapsychic focus in therapy, and his later books, such as On Becoming a Person, and Becoming a Partner reveal a significant focus on relationships. Although that shift of focus was a disturbing experiential adventure for Rogers, he acknowledges this disturbing factor:

the degree to which I can create relationships which facilitate the growth of others as separate persons is a measure of the growth I have achieved

²⁵ Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 122.

in myself. In some respects this is a disturbing thought, but it is also a promising or challenging one.²⁶

Nevertheless, Rogers' acknowledgment of his earlier failure for not focusing on interpersonal relationships, was a new step for him. Rogers' attempt to go beyond his earlier exclusive intrapsychic approach to therapy has been outlined in his later work. Clinebell further observes and acknowledges Rogers' shift when he observes,

In his later thought, Rogers has moved beyond the exclusively intrapsychic focus of his earlier books to devote more attention to growthful relationships. In Becoming Partners; Marriage and its Alternatives he concludes that four basic elements make for a long-term sustained growth by both persons. (1) Relationship because that relationship is enriching their love and lives and they wish it to grow; (2) open and full communication of feelings, positive and negative; (3) not accepting the roles and expectations of others; (4) continuing personal growth by both persons towards becoming the unique persons they potentially are.²⁷

In spite of the affirmations and contributions that a Rogerian model would make in a Bantu cultural context, his model as a therapeutic system requires significant modification, if it is to function well among the Bantu. In other words, if Rogers had developed his model to function well with the Bantus, he would have decided to incorporate the following five important areas in his client-centered model of therapy:

²⁶ Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 56.

²⁷ Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 119.

1. Bantu African worldview.
2. Bantu African concept of the eco-community.
3. Bantu African confrontational approach in a therapeutic process.
4. Bantu African revised phenomenological approach to therapy.
5. Bantu African emphasis on spiritual growth and therapy.

First, Rogers' eighteenth-century Euro-American mechanistic and deterministic view of the universe in which he operates is problematic. Rogers' problem is that his theory of therapeutic change reflects an eighteenth-century view of the universe which functions on assumptions of causal efficacy or cause and effect. For instance, Ridley observes that "the central thesis of client-centered therapy states that if the therapist has certain interdependent attitudes--namely, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and emphatic understanding--then growth will occur in the client."²⁸ Rogers assumes and calls these attitudes necessary and sufficient conditions for therapeutic and personality changes. He further holds that if these conditions are present, therapeutic change will invariably occur.²⁹ In contrast to Rogers' therapeutic system, the Bantu do not view life in terms of cause and

²⁸ Ridley, "Client-Centered Therapy," 176-77.

²⁹ Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy, 177.

effect. The Bantu view life as a continuous process of mutual causation of life forces in the psycho-universe.

Function of the Therapist in Bantu Healing

This subsection will deal with the place and function of the therapist in the Bantu religious universe. This writer shall discuss therapeutic methodologies that are employed to deal with illness in the Bantu religious universe. The Bantu traditional therapeutic arena is made up of "diviners"--mediums who fall under the same umbrella as specialists. These specialists have suffered a great deal from European and American writers, who have called them "witch doctors," without a clear understanding of their professional role in the Bantu religious universe. The term "witch doctor" is a prejudiced term and should be rejected. African traditional religions play a great and significant part in cosmic healing process among the Bantu people. This is significant because in the Bantu worldview, religion permeates deeply into all departments of life. Religious detachment would be to deny anyone a possibility of being human. It is from this religious commitment from which contemporary mental health professionals in Africa have noted that traditional Bantu healers have a greater success in alleviating psychological disturbances than individualistic Western trained psychotherapists.³⁰

The diviner or mganga is a charismatic religious leader

³⁰ Oosthuizen, 46.

who has the ability to transcend the realm of normal every day life to the para-cosmic realm of reality.³¹ Diviners serve as a link between the visible and invisible world. Their methodology of healing has been questioned by Western-trained psychotherapists. They have been labeled as unprofessional without understanding their role in the community. The power of the mganga is a communal power which is conferred upon the mganga as a representative of their community. Augsburger says,

The traditional healer may exercise social power --the power of channeling, resolving, or utilizing the social conflicts embedded in the tribe or community. Diviners, healers...function as conflict experts who detect the active agents of conflict situations and exercise the power to control or direct them. The nganga, in Zaire, is seen as the great peacemaker and guardian of the community. His individual interventions of healing are seen as barometers of the public [mental] health.³²

The mganga has the ability to penetrate the communal psychology. He/she has wide knowledge of the history of the community and familial lineage. The mganga use all his/her knowledge to maintain and restore the cosmic equilibrium in the eco-community. The mganga views illness as a disruption of the cosmic equilibrium, which calls for a cosmocentric approach. The mganga have highly developed psychotherapeutic and social therapeutic intervention

³¹ Mganga is a Swahili term for a diviner and medicine man/woman among the Bantus.

³² Augsburger, 281.

skills. When persons become ill, the mganga sees the condition as symptomatic of the festering relation in the cosmos and call all kin together to discuss problems and any concealed feelings in order to make peace publicly.³³ The term kin here has a much wider significance than the living relative; it includes the ancestral spirits and the living dead.

A traditional healer is able to achieve a greater success in alleviating psychological disturbances emerging from the community because his/her therapeutic approach is synthetic and therefore incarnational as opposed to analytic. The diviners among the Bantus do not view the psycho-universe in dualistic terms, since there is no dichotomy between physical and spiritual, sacred and profane. Their universe is a unified universe, and it is from this cosmology that they exercise their incarnational synthetic therapeutic duties.³⁴ In this respect, diagnosis and treatment is focused on the understanding of what constitutes mental well-being and mental illness in a specific cultural context in relation to the psycho-universe.

³³ Augsburger, 281.

³⁴ Oosthuizen, 47.

Chapter 6

Diagnosis and Therapy

Diagnosis and Treatment Among the Bantu

This chapter addresses the Bantu synthetic and incarnational dimensions of diagnosis and treatment. It further explores how the concept of what constitutes well-being and illness, determines the diagnosis and treatment.

The early missionaries argued that the African people did not have a scientific system for diagnosis in treating emotional disturbances. This was a biased view based on prejudices, and led to labeling those systems as unscientific and pagan. Nevertheless, Jean Masamba argues that the study of African traditional mental health has shown that one does not need to be a psychiatrist or even psychopathologist in order to see the advanced nature of traditional medical and mental health delivery system in the African traditional society.¹ One needs only to be acquainted with traditional healing among the following groups of Bantu people: Xhosa of South Africa, Nganga-ngombo and nganga-mbuki among the Congo, the Meru, Akambas and Miji Kenda of Kenya, in order to understand the depth of their mental health delivery system. These groups have a skilled therapeutic system which has greatly contributed to mental

¹ Jean Masamba, "A Brief Review of Psychiatric Research in Africa: Some Implications for Pastoral Counseling," in Pastoral Care and Counseling in Africa Today, vol 1, eds. Jean Masamba, and Daisy Nwachuku (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 12.

health among the African people.

The Western denial of the presence of a health delivery system among the Bantu was based upon the Western belief and misconception that Africans had no soul and therefore were incapable of feeling and therefore were immune from emotional crises. The Bantu people have never been immune to psychosocial tension. Masamba points this out clearly, when he says,

Traditional Africa was not devoid of psychosocial tensions. It is with surprise that some Western philosophers believed that the African had no soul thus was unable to feel, believe, express emotions, and suffer from emotional crisis. Educational, medical and psychotherapeutic systems of solving human problems were part of the development processes and living arrangements in all African societies.²

Even though members in traditional society never experienced as much stress as in modern times, they approached stress within the context of the community. Today this stress has increased a great deal due to modern social change. Many African people are affected by the introduction of fragmented modern styles of living. In their report A. H. Leighton and T. A. Lambo observed that

16% of the adults in rural villages and 17% of the adults in segments of a city in Nigeria had psychiatric symptoms to a significant degree. The impairment was found to be related to the degree of disintegration in the social environment. The prevalence of psychoneurotic symptoms was greater among men than among women, due to the fact that

² Masamba, "Brief Review," 12.

the Yoruba male is in a position to suffer the effects of social change much more than the female.³

In Africa, due to these emerging factors, there is a great need to develop diagnostic terminologies that interpret the nature of African psychopathology. This is essential because Western terminologies have proved to be inadequate, as they stem from the Cartesian and Newtonian cosmology and therefore incapable of describing the Bantu reality of psychopathology in the Bantu psycho-universe:

The influence of culture in shaping the individual's perception towards oneself, others and the environment is a reality which can no longer be ignored. Diagnosis and therapy which have heavily depended upon Western interpretations need, therefore, to be free from Western cultural control. We do accept the universality of humankind, but this recognition should not prevent us from accepting the basic personality, that is the identity, of each group of persons who share common socio-cultural roots, living some experiences and expressing feelings in the context of their cultural values.⁴

Looking at individualistic Western diagnostic interpretations into the nature of psychopathology, anxiety neurosis occurs when an event disturbs the mental equilibrium of the "individual." This neurosis manifests itself in psychosomatic symptoms. This kind of

³ Alexander Leighton and T. A. Lambo, Psychiatric Disorder Among the Yoruba (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), as quoted in Masamba, "Brief Review," 13.

⁴ Jean Masamba, "Kindoki as Diagnosis and Therapy," in Pastoral Care and Counseling in Africa Today, vol 1, eds. Jean Masamba and Daisy Nwachuku (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), 92-93.

interpretation of the nature of anxiety neurosis is inadequate. It focuses on an intrapsychic vision of the "individual" monad. This interpretation has nothing to say about other cosmic selves that are a part of the "individual" which affect that "individual." This intrapsychic focus is evident in other individualistic Western interpretations of neurotic illness such as hysteria neurosis, phobic neurosis, obsessive-compulsive neurosis, depressive neurosis.

Similarly, psychotic disorders are equally given similar intrapsychic interpretation and diagnosis. These interpretations and diagnoses do not include all cosmic systems. However, the tendency to give an individualistic Western interpretation and diagnosis to the nature of Bantu psychopathology is a common temptation on the part of African mental health professionals. Masamba observes that "numerous problems in diagnosis are partly due to the desire of fitting every mental symptom into a Western classification."⁵ For instance, most psychotic disorders, such as melancholic psychoses, involutional psychoses, schizophrenic psychoses, reactive psychosis, puerperal psychoses, toxic psychoses and unusual psychoses have been treated with little success from individualistic Western therapeutic approaches. Though the symptoms manifested may be the same, the healing approach is different because the

⁵ Masamba, "Brief Review," 18.

nature of understanding well-being and illness demands a different approach from Western understanding.

In the last twenty years, a new move by African mental health professionals has included traditional incarnational synthetic and incarnational therapeutic approaches in diagnosis and treatment, in spite of some resistance at the beginning. However, there has been great progress in this direction in the last two decades. A clear example of this movement is seen in the decision to include traditional mental health treatment in the university curriculum.

This move is essential because understanding the Bantu cosmology is a key towards diagnosis and treatment. Bantu cosmology is a cosmology of interaction as described in chapter two. It consists of beings who live in an harmonious relationship with other beings in the psycho-universe. These beings are immanently endowed by life forces connected with the cosmic universal life force NTU, and the living, the living dead, spiritual being and other cosmic beings are part of this cosmic constellation. The health depends to a greater extent on their relationship with an extended family and with their ancestors, who mostly communicate their wishes through dreams and divinities who co-exist with other spirits.⁶ It is this cosmic psycho-universe of the Bantu cosmology that dictates different interpretations and approaches towards diagnosis and

⁶ Masamba, "Brief Review," 24.

treatment of emotional disturbances. Masamba observes that

The traditional African cosmology is dynamic. It recognizes and integrates the duality of mind and body, magical and rationality, order and disorder, negative and positive powers, and individual and communal consciousnesses (Laleye 1981). The maintenance of personal and social equilibriums in the midst of this apparent dualism becomes the major role of traditional diagnosis, psychotherapy and medical symptoms.⁷

The Bantu diagnosis has to address mutual causation of etiological factors in order to provide adequate treatment. The Bantu people are usually concerned with the spiritual meaning behind illness more than nosographic nature of illness. Therefore, mutual causation of illness become a spiritual issue which has to be addressed in the process of therapy. The spiritual cosmic dimension of illness is not usually addressed in the Western individualistic psychotherapeutic traditions such as psychoanalysis and client-centered therapy. For instance, a Bantu person may be seen making an appointment with a traditional therapist while continuing therapy with a Western trained therapist. Some patients suffering from psychoneurosis, respond better to traditional synthetic therapy than Western analytic approaches.⁸

In traditional synthetic incarnational therapeutic methodology, the diagnosis is always synthetic and etiological in that it searches for and announces the nature

⁷ Masamba, "Brief Review," 24.

⁸ Masamba, "Brief Review," 28.

of mutual cosmic cause of illness.⁹ There is always a psycho-cosmic dimension involved in the process of diagnosis and treatment. This psycho-cosmic-centered approach differs a great deal from the Western major analytic therapeutic method. For the Bantu, mental and emotional disorders are viewed as a manifestation of cosmic disequilibrium in the psycho-universe. To deal with these cosmic forces one has to be aware of the presence of these cosmic forces and address them in the therapeutic process for the restoration of the cosmic equilibrium. Masamba says,

In African thinking, mental disorder is perceived to be persecution of, or more precisely as aggression against, the individual self by other socio-cultural and spiritual selves. Thus, the ancestral spirits, in the therapeutic process, participate primarily in solving conflicting relationships arising from the violation of traditional norms. The healer, on the other hand, orchestrates significant events capable of reconciling broken relationships.¹⁰

In such a cosmic mutual causation, therapeutic goals are aimed at clarifying the cosmic conflict which are believed to have brought disequilibrium in the psycho-universe.¹¹ Therapy involves careful understanding of the interplay of these cosmic forces and their impact upon other beings. The restoration of cosmic harmony is the primary goal in diagnosis and treatment. Masamba says,

⁹ Masamba, "Brief Review," 24.

¹⁰ Masamba, "Brief Review," 25.

¹¹ Masamba, "Brief Review," 25.

The restoration of broken relations, the re-establishment of social equilibrium, the revitalization of individual identity within the context of the renewed community, are all major means and dynamic ends underlying traditional [synthetic] therapies and healing processes.¹²

Masamba points out that for psychotherapy and pastoral counseling to be effective in Africa, a serious study of African psychodynamic is essential. When making any form of diagnosis or even proposing any procedures for treatment the Bantu interpretation of illness and well-being should be taken into account.¹³

Bantu Methods of Diagnosis and Treatment

The concept of what constitutes well-being is crucial for determining a proper diagnosis and treatment goals. For the Bantus, the concept of the cosmic universal life force (NTU) captures the notion of health and well-being. Life is viewed as multidimensional, it is personal and communal, subjective and objective. The personal life and the communal life are inseparably connected. The persons in the community are ontically comprised of one unity. The health and well-being of a human being are interdependent upon the well-being of other beings in the universe. This includes the equilibrium between other persons, community, animate and inanimate beings, spirits and God. This kind of ontic relationship expresses the notion that life is lived in

¹² Masamba, "Brief Review," 25.

¹³ Masamba, "Brief Review, " 27-28.

intercosmic relationships between the living, the living dead, and other beings in the universe.

Consequently, one can say that this cosmic relationship is pivotal. This understanding should inform the cosmic interpretation of what constitutes illness and well-being. For example, Lambo discovered in his research more than 90 percent of students who had obtained therapeutic consultation in Nigeria after returning from their studies in England, tended to explain the root causes of their illness as having cosmic and cultural roots. They attributed the nature of their illness to bewitchment (Urogi). Bewitchment is a manifestation of a broken life force (NTU) in the eco-communal systems.

Bewitchment is a psychological reality among the Bantu. This reality has been neglected by the Christian churches and mental health professionals. But yet it remains a vital part in understanding the dimensions of Bantu psychopathology. Masamba says, "The denial of psychological basis for witchcraft has resulted in superficial verbal attack on the evils of sorcery."¹⁴ It is only today that the healing professionals risks studying this cosmic phenomenon named bewitchment. The notion of bewitchment is a metaphor to explain the broken cosmic relationship. It is an essential part towards diagnosis and treatment among the Bantu. This is essential because the Bantu concepts of

¹⁴ Masamba, "Brief Review," 78.

mental illness and mental health are more cosmic than biological.

It is wrongly assumed that since there are so many urbanized people in Africa, cosmic disequilibrium as a root cause of mental illness is not an issue needing to be addressed in psychotherapy. This is a misconception because many people in Africa, whether educated or urbanized and whether acknowledged or not, consider cosmic disequilibrium in the universe as the root causes of mental illness. In Sierra Leone, for example, Harry Sawyer and Birenda Singh have mentioned this fact of bewitchment as a metaphor describing this cosmic disequilibrium in the universe--rural areas have 29.2 percent, urban areas have 20.5 percent, semi-urban areas have 17.2 percent.¹⁵ Masamba says,

The disfavour of the deities, the enmity of others in the community, broken interpersonal relationships, are major outside forces believed to precipitate [mental] illness. Bewitchment becomes therefore a psychocultural persecutory symbolism.¹⁶

The belief in bewitchment offers a channel through which traditional people could therapeutically deal with the cosmic psychological forces of hate, hostility, guilt, and existential anxiety which were not culturally addressed in any other way. Belief in bewitchment served the purpose of

¹⁵ Harry Sawyer and Birenda Singh, "Attitudes Towards Morbidity in Sierra Leone and Implications for African Pastoral Care," in Pastoral Care and Counseling in Africa Today, ed. Jean Masamba (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 173.

¹⁶ Masamba, "Brief Review," 79.

diffusing and integrating the neurotic anxiety that would have otherwise developed into severe neurosis. In this respect, one can say that the belief in bewitchment had psychosocial and psychocommunal functions.¹⁷ Neurosis, from this point of view, is a disequilibrium in the eco-community:

Individual cannot achieve health alone, but only as a properly functioning member of a community. The sickness of an individual is a symptom of a deeper communal malaise. To deal with the symptom is at most of temporary benefit; real healing requires the reestablishment of right-relationships. This is the concern of diviner and doctor or medicine-man.¹⁸

To restore equilibrium where disequilibrium reigns, the healing process demands the restoration of the life forces (NTU) in the universe. Equilibrium is restored by treating the broken relationships in the psycho-universe to re-establish harmony in the ecological community.

Psychotherapy and the Eco-community

The cosmos, as the center of intercosmic relationship, acknowledges the eco-community as a basis on which NTU receives communal expression in the unified universe. As mentioned earlier, humankind's well-being is therefore seen as kept in harmony with this cosmic unity. This holistic understanding of well-being calls for a paradigm shift from an individual-centered approach, to a communal-centered

¹⁷ Masamba, "Brief Review," 79.

¹⁸ Booth, "Traditional and Community," 91.

approach where persons will be at peace within the scheme of things.

This communal approach to well-being has greatly contributed to both the past and present understanding of African Christianity. Tertullian, an African born in Carthage, could not perceive the concept of repentance without this communal and cosmic dimension. His understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation had a communal and cosmic dimension to it. Tertullian's introduction of exomologesis in the Christian liturgy points to this communal dimension of human wholeness. He could not perceive how an individual could receive forgiveness, reconciliation to God, and then to the community, without public communal confession. For Tertullian, exomologesis not only helped open channels of reconciliation of the person and the community, but also opened channels of reconciliation with God and with other beings in the universe. Tertullian understood well-being and illness in terms of communal equilibrium and communal disequilibrium, respectively.¹⁹

Healing among the Xhosa reflects this communal dimension. It begins with the ritual of purification where water is used as a symbol of cleansing, but at the same time

¹⁹ Tertullian's treatise "On Repentance," trans. William P. Le Saint (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1959), in William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective: An Essay With Exhibits (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 94.

as a cosmic symbol connecting the person with the natural environment with which the person is ontologically related:

To get the whole picture of a person a doctor [therapist] must enter into personal relationship with him as a whole being. Thus, with our neighbor, with nature, with society and with God. This I think is the broadest definition of spiritual life. It is what makes us a real person.²⁰

This approach suggests a paradigm shift, from a anthropocentric model to a cosmocentric model. It amplifies human existence as basically corporate with other beings in the interrelated universe. This is evidently so, because, according to the Bantu, a human's psyche is not only seen as the domain of mental activities, but also as an extension of cosmic interactions.²¹

It is from this understanding that it is becoming imperative to explore a new way of doing therapy; a way that will reflect the Bantu understanding of the universe and the place of human-kind in that universe. This is significant because any Western individualistic approach that begins from an individual's internal frame of reference is problematic, since it does not reflect this cosmic dimension of human personality. It is because of this basic problem that individualistic Western therapeutic methods are incapable of dealing with the human personality because

²⁰ Paul Tournier, "Relationships: The Third Dimension of Medicine," Contact [Geneva, WCC], October 1978, 2.

²¹ Masamba, "Kindoki as Diagnosis and Therapy," 96.

their approach produces individual egos. This basic problem is solved in a cosmocentric approach which addresses the cosmic, communal, and relational issues in therapy.

The basic difference between the individual-centered model and cosmocentric model is that while the individual-centered model views mental illness as causing the situation of unhappiness, the cosmocentric model views the situation of unhappiness as causing the mental illness. Therefore, the former focuses on dealing with the individual mental illness for individual well-being while the latter focuses on improving the cosmic equilibrium for mental well-being. The former does not call for restoration of cosmic equilibrium in dealing with the mental illness, while the latter calls for cosmic and communal participation in dealing with the mental illness.²²

Cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy aims toward changing or improving the cosmic disequilibrium that causes mental illness. The situation is improved by restoration of the cosmic equilibrium in the eco-community. This cosmic dimension emerges from the Bantu understanding of Muntu since the

life of the muntu is not limited to his own person, but that it extends to all that is fathered by his vital influence, to all ontologically subjected to him: posterity, land, possessions, beasts and all other goods.²³

²² Masamba, "Brief Review," 97.

²³ Tempels, 143.

Our concern here, however, is to evaluate this dimension of the African spirit universe and its implication for therapy. As we discovered in chapter three, the vertical dimension of kinship includes the departed members of the family--living-dead and the unborn. In traditional society, departed members of the family are thought to be concerned with the affairs of their surviving families--to whom they belonged in their physical life. In most cases, if they were unfairly treated by the living members of the family before their death, they are believed to take revenge in return as an expression of their anger. To appease an angry spirit of the living-dead, the living members of the family may offer a sacrifice, whereby a restored relationship henceforth is maintained by pouring a libation in order to be in communion with the living dead. A counselor may be faced with a pathology arising from a situation like this, where the identified patient is a spirit of the living-dead, who cannot be invited into a counseling session. A psychopathology arising from such a situation surely calls for an understanding and a different approach. The counselor has to address him/herself to this cosmic dimension of the Bantu universe which demands a cosmocentric approach.

Masamba cites a case of a woman named Mafuana who had married in her twenties without proper consultation with other cosmic life forces in the universe. As the story

goes, she faced many marital problems, hence a situation of unhappiness set into her family. Masamba reports that Mafwana came to him for therapeutic help. At the time, she was divorced, and suffering from an "acute anxiety neurosis." She reported having repetitive dreams of her deceased grandfather telling her to kill a goat as an atonement with her kin who had not approved of her marriage. She further reported to Masamba that during her married life, she had hallucinations of being spanked by her grandfather when making love to her husband.

Masamba reports that he had a few sessions with her after which she agreed to return to the village to do what she was asked to do by the deceased grandfather. Masamba observes the therapeutic outcome of her return to the village: "In the village she experienced a total catharsis and returned to Kinshasa [city] a new person."²⁴

This is a living example of cosmocentric therapeutic intervention. Here, the recurrent reported experience of being spanked by a deceased grandfather was a symbol of her kin's disapproval of her getting married without proper consultation with other members of the kinship. Mafwana's return to her village was a positive therapeutic move. It not only reconnected her with the living members of the kinship but also with the spirit of living dead, restoring the ontological equilibrium with both the living and the

²⁴ Masamba, "Kindoki as Diagnosis and Therapy," 81.

living dead. The level of integration of the self with the eco-community was achieved as the basis through which Mafwana's problems were addressed. This integration may be achieved with or without the presence of the therapist. In the case of Mafwana, the therapist was physically absent. Nevertheless, even with the absence of the therapist, the level of cosmic integration and wholeness was achieved. In this case, the situation was focused in dealing with her neurosis and not the neurosis itself.

Bantu Music and Healing

Music plays a central part in the lives of the Bantu people. It is used as a tool to enhance the NTU of Muntu, as well as other beings in the Bantu universe, to achieve ontological harmony in the universe.

Through music, psycho-cosmic universal links are reactivated and energized to assist persons to attain their psychocosmic equilibrium. It is from this psychocosmic nature, that music not only is able to meet psychological needs but also psychosomatic needs, and the psychospiritual needs of the Bantu people.

Music, in this respect, is not just an activity that is divorced from the person who participates in the music, but is a part of the person who sings it. It has ontological and sociodramatic associations. Through music, the experience of the community is expressed in a symbolic language that penetrates the psyche of the community in a

powerful way.

Music expresses the mood of every occasion by capturing the anxieties, fears, hopes, joys, frustrations of the community in such a way that the emotions are released to achieve healing. The beats of the drums themselves speak a therapeutic language of their own. Bantu music not only depicts the mood of the occasion, but dramatizes that mood in music. Healing takes place as the emotions are released and shared in the participatory music of the Bantu people. For example, if the occasion is a death in the family, the pokomo of Kenya sing in groups. Each group responds to the pain expressed by the other group in a way in which all participate in the healing process.

As we found in chapter four, there are songs that are culturally designed to address identity issues in the development of Muntu. Music gives Bantu people a sense of identity and meaning, and through its expression, they are able to get in touch with the cosmic world and communicate with the universe without any fear of intimidation. Music provides hope and determination in the midst of hardships and hopelessness--not only to express those feelings of hardship, but also to dramatize those feelings through music in order to make those experiences concrete. Berinyuu says,

All songs that fall directly under any of these categories are usually accompanied by some strong emotion of one kind or another. Some are even born out of a particular historical circumstance. In such a case, singing the song may not just be entertainment but may recapitulate an historical

experience precipitating strong emotions. If one visits an African house it may be possible to deduce what may have immediately transpired in the family if one listens to the songs usually sung by women. At times, the song may reflect the immediate circumstances between husband and wife, but it could be a circumstance between the family as a unit against another of the same clan or even the whole family against another family.²⁵

Therefore, music is a very powerful therapeutic tool in Africa. Through Bantu music, persons get in touch with themselves, the community, and cosmic life forces which leads to the restoration of cosmic harmony.

Consequently, as an aspect of cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy, music effectively helps persons at a psychological level to integrate the self into a psycho-cosmic level of being in the eco-community. Through music, the living and the living dead communicate those feelings which could not otherwise be communicated without this expression of music.

Towards a Cosmocentric Model of Pastoral Psychotherapy

The cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy, which emerges from the Bantu African worldview, sees the highest degree of humanness in terms of helping human beings to be ontologically interconnected within the ontological web of existence. This proposed new model of pastoral psychotherapy operates from the following presuppositions:

- That the highest degree of humanness is achieved

²⁵ Abraham Adu Berinyuu, Towards Theory and Practice of Pastoral Counseling in Africa (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 125.

when beings are ontologically interconnected with other "beings" in the eco-community.

- That the worthiness, value and belongingness of beings is an ontological reality concept which does not need to be proved in the face of the universe.
- That individualism leads to destruction and disintegration of the self; disintegration of the eco-community resulting from egocentricity; and isolation and despair. Coenocentricity is the goal of cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy.
- That the dualistic view of the universe will lead to disintegration of life in the universe and, therefore, should not be the vision for future pastoral psychotherapy.

This model seeks to assist beings to attain the highest degree of cosmic integration within the eco-community of other beings. For the Bantu, mental well-being does not simply mean a healthy body and a healthy mind. Mental illness and mental well-being are not just viewed as a physical and a mental condition of individuals alone. Among the Bantu, mental illness and mental well-being have both a communal and religious implication and meaning.²⁶ Any kind of mental illness among the Bantu is perceived as an imbalance in the cosmic universal life force (NTU) within

²⁶ Oosthuizen, 47.

the eco-community in which persons are a part.²⁷ The cosmocentric model has been inspired by the following Western holistic models of psychotherapy: "Psychosynthesis" as developed by Roberto Assagioli; the family system as developed by Salvador Minuchin and Virginia Satir; Gestalt therapy as developed by Frederick Perls; Feminist therapy as developed by R. D. Laing and T. Szasz; and "Growth Counseling" as developed by Howard Clinebell.

Psychosynthesis is an holistic approach to healing and growth in which spiritual growth is enhanced through the integration of the conscious self with the transpersonal self through three phases, namely: personal synthesis, spiritual synthesis and transpersonal synthesis. Reflecting on this process of integration to wholeness and growth, Clinebell says: "The integration of synthesis of interpersonal relationships, of the individual with various groups, with the whole human family, and with the spiritual reality called God--all may be part of this third phase."²⁸

Family system therapy strongly advocates that the so-called identified patient is not necessarily the sick person. In most cases the one labeled as the sick person is viewed by system theory as the one who manifests a deeper pathology existing within the whole system. In this case,

²⁷ Oosthuizen, 49.

²⁸ Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 270.

therapy is aimed at synthesizing all the social system by opening blocked channels of communication in the family system to restore family homeostasis.²⁹

Gestalt therapy is a holistic configuration that brings all separated parts of the self into one single unified whole. It rejects the split between the mind, body and soul which has existed in Western psychotherapy. Gestalt therapy advocates that a healthy personality maintains an organic unity of the whole person who remains in constant harmonious interaction with the self with other selves in the universe. This interaction increases psychological awareness for wholeness.³⁰

Feminist therapy advocates liberation from within and from without. This liberation is aimed at social systems that dehumanize human beings from realizing their inherent potentialities. Here therapy aims at increasing interdependence and interconnectedness of all life in the universe by assisting humans to develop undeveloped potentialities such as assertiveness by integrating it with inherent potentials of nurturing for growth and wholeness. This integration is done through creative synthesis of all psychological and social systems that impinge on the

²⁹ See Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 216-19.

³⁰ See Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 169-70.

psychological well-being of all humans.³¹

Growth counseling is a spirit-centered counseling which aims at helping humans to realize their latent potentials through counseling and education. Through growth counseling, humans are assisted in achieving liberation from the jails of un-lived aspects of life to experience the fullness of life.³²

These five contemporary models of therapy aim at human wholeness tapping into psychological and psycho-spiritual resources and intercosmic resources (See table 3 on page 223).

³¹ See Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 238.

³² See Clinebell, Growth Counseling, 17-18.

TABLE 3

Major Western Holistic Therapeutic Models that Inspires
The Cosmocentric Model of Pastoral Psychotherapy

Therapeutic Model.	Key Person(s)	Emphasis	Driving Force	Therapeutic Goal.	Worldview	Defects of the Model
Psychosynthesis	R. Assagioli	Spiritual aspect. of experience. Psychosynthesis. Integration. Harmony.	Spiritual energy. Will. Imagination.	Increased awareness and identification to spiritual transpersonal self.	Two way causation. Interpersonal. Anthropocentric.	Cosmic experience is lost.
Family System (Family centered)	S. Minuchin V. Satir P. Alto D. Jackson G. Bateson	Family aspects of experience.	Believes that the so called identified patient is not necessarily the sick person.	Family's well-being. Family homeostasis.	Circular interpersonal causation. Anthropocentric.	Cosmic experience is lost.
Gestalt Therapy	F. Perls	Gestalt aspects of experience.	Creativity.	To increase psychological aliveness.	Social and environmental causation. Anthro-environmental centered.	Cosmic experience is lost.
Feminist Therapies	R. D. Laing T. Szusz	Radical social change aspects of experience. Empowerment.	Spirituality. Interrelatedness. Interconnectedness.	Radical social change. Social liberation for wholeness. Integration.	Interpersonal causation. Connectedness. Anthropocentric.	Cosmic experience is lost. Extreme radical feminist encourages separation.
Growth Counseling (Spirit centered)	H. Clinebell	Ecological potentialization aspects of experience. Growth/spiritual centered.	Spirituality. E'lan. Creativity.	Ecological. Potentializing and integration.	Mutual causation. Eco-systemic centered.	Complete cosmic experience is lost.

The Contribution of a Cosmocentric Model to Post-Modern
Pastoral Psychotherapy

The cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy is an holistic, contextualized model which conceives the cosmos as the basic focus of redemption, healing and restoration. This results in mental well-being and wholeness, where all beings are restored to wellness.

In this respect, the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy finds limitations in existing and prevalent traditional anthropocentric models of psychotherapy championed by Western individualistic models of psychotherapy. They aim at helping individuals to differentiate themselves, and attain the highest degree of "personal identity" and "self fulfillment." This direction in psychotherapy may sometimes lead to a deeper psychopathology such as egocentricity, isolation and individualism. Cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy aims at creating a coenocentric awareness of all life as opposed to individualistic and egocentric levels of awareness. A cosmocentric vision of pastoral psychotherapy makes a significant contribution in creating a coenocentric feeling with other beings in the psycho-universe. Coenocentric awareness holds that there is an existential ontological basic commonality in all beings in the face of the universe. It does not suggest that beings are worth proving and affirming, but believes that all beings are already

ontologically worthy and affirmed. Coenocentric awareness, which the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy champions, promises a deep sense of unity in the psycho-universe which aims at consecrating the whole life of persons and other beings into the "eco-kinship."

Coenocentrism makes life holy; it reduces egocentric perturbances, promotes tranquility and relaxation, and hastens a cherishing of life for its own sake without ulterior motives. The coenocentric perspective also softens subject-object dichotomy, particularly as it applies to interpersonal relations because it affirms human existence in a way that is universal and invariant among individuals. Coenocentric affirmation is an acceptance of being and worth of oneself and all other humans and it lessens, if not eliminates destructive self negation and unwarranted alienation from others.³³

Coenocentric awareness--which is the aim of the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy--will promote and create a sense of wellness, vitality and wholeness within beings in the universe, where one will find oneself at peace with self and other beings in the eco-community.

The Original Contribution of This Research to Scholarship

First, this dissertation offers a new model of pastoral psychotherapy which is contextualized and holistic in its theory and practice. It takes a synthetic incarnational approach in healing and restoration of the cosmic equilibrium in the eco-community. Second, the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy offers an exit from the universally emerging human problem of individualism,

³³ Stark, 30.

dualism, egocentricity, isolationism and nominalism promoted by anthropocentrism. This model will enhance coenocentric awareness among all beings in the eco-community.

A cosmocentric approach as a therapeutic model, seriously takes note of a client's attitude towards other beings in the eco-community, and emerges from the belief that there is a continuous cosmic interaction of life forces (NTU) in the universe. This therapeutic approach relates and expands family systems theory, and goes beyond it. The family system focuses on healing the family system as a way of healing persons. Just as family therapists know that an identified patient only manifests the symptoms of a dysfunctional system, equally the cosmocentric model view mental illness as a symptom of a disequilibrium in the cosmic life force (NTU) in the psycho-universe. Restoration of cosmic balance and harmony to an interconnected universe, inevitably results not only restoring mental health to distressed persons but also to the whole psycho-universe.

The cosmocentric model of therapy in this respect goes beyond the family system approach, because it aims in restoring homeostasis not only to the family system, but to whole cosmic systems. The cosmocentric approach, by its holistic nature, rejects analysis, which aims at separating the whole into component parts of the self in order to understand the relational dimension of each part of the self to the whole in favor of synthesis. The cosmocentric model

of pastoral psychotherapy emerges out of a deep conviction rooted in the Bantu cultural context that personality is essentially and inescapably intercosmic. This is true because in a cosmocentric perspective, all experiences are actually viewed as intercosmic in their very essence. What goes on between beings in the universe is always intertwined with what goes on with other beings. Therefore, the best way to understand these beings is to approach them as intercosmic selves.

Cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy emphasizes integration, unity, wholeness and cosmic harmony. This therapeutic model calls for an incarnational synthetic approach with all cosmic universal life forces. This incarnational synthetic incarnational approach seriously takes personal synthesis, spiritual synthesis and cosmic synthesis as the principles of cosmic integration leading to wholeness. The table on page 255 shows how the cosmocentric model is the model of the future.

Cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy has a close affinity with the psychosynthesis of Roberto Assagioli. Clinebell, reflecting on psychosynthesis, says that:

Clearly psychosynthesis is a system-oriented approach. The integration of synthesis of interpersonal relationships of individuals with various groups, with the whole human family, and with the spiritual reality called God--all may be part of this third phase of growth. The essential unity of these different relationships is understood as transpersonal spiritual oneness.

Since persons live inextricably in relationships, a good will always involves harmonization with the wills of others and with the nature.³⁴

This approach contrasts with the Rogerian model, which is an individual-centered model, the cosmic-centered model focuses on cosmic interrelationships, and cosmic equilibrium and disequilibrium is the primary focus.

Furthermore, while client-centered models view sources of strength as emerging from the individual's ability to direct his or herself to reclaim autonomy in the self discovery processes for restoring individual wholeness, the cosmocentric model views the ecological community as a source of strength which has an ability to integrate a person into the social and cosmic realms of reality. Cosmocentric healing and wholeness is a process through which beings are assisted to discover the immanent richness in divine cosmic "yes" to life in its totality luring them to freedom from toxic anxiety due to the disequilibrium in fragmented views found in modern living. The cosmic dimensions of wholeness open blocked spiritual channels to a greater cosmic spiritual illumination, where beings are purged of all life-denying elements and allows them to live in peace with themselves, God and others in the panstructured universe. Table 4 below shows the dimensions of the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy as articulated by this writer.

³⁴ Clinebell, Contemporary Growth Therapies, 270.

TABLE 4

Dimensions of the Cosmocentric Model of Pastoral Psychotherapy

Thera- peutic Model	Key Person	Emphasis	Driving Force	Thera- peutic Goal	Worldview	Defects
Cosmo- centric (ecolog- ical) Incarna- tional synthetic approach.	P. Multi Rukungah	Inter-cosmic aspects of experience. Communal inter- dependent. Spirituality Cosmic harmony. Cosmo- synthesis.	Cosmic universal life force (NTU). Spirit- uality. Creat- ivity.	Cosmic well- being. Coeno- centricity Becoming. Cosmic equil- ibrium. Integration.	Mutual causation holistic. Eco-community Cosmo- centric.	

This cosmic wholeness acknowledges God's continuous involvement in the universe, transforming the present reality and luring all beings into this incarnational transforming activity, and into new possibilities of fullness of God in Christ. The coming of Jesus Christ, as a cosmic universal life force, is a symbol of the restoration of the cosmic wholeness. In Christ, humankind recaptures the cosmic centeredness of life lost in anthropocentrism as reflected in the fall of humankind. Christ--our cosmic universal life force--suffers with the world restoring cosmic equilibrium in the universe. Thus, it is from this understanding that it is important to define the cosmocentric model of pastoral psychotherapy as we come to

the close of this dissertation. Cosmocentric pastoral psychotherapy is a therapeutic process in which a pastoral psychotherapist observes, understands, and interprets the psycho-cosmic, psychological, religious, moral and theological dimensions of an ongoing process through psychocommunal frames of reference within the ecological community. This way of doing therapy calls for an incarnational synthetic approach where a therapist assists clients to integrate the ongoing processes to attain psychocommunal equilibrium hence leading to wholeness. (See Figure 4, below)

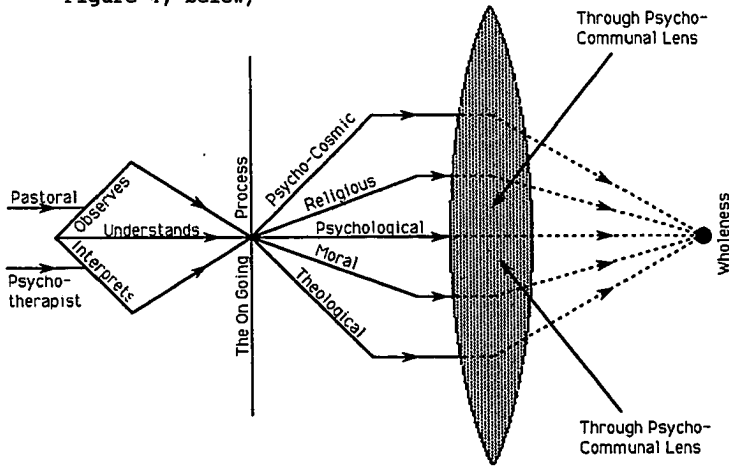


Figure 4
Therapeutic Process of the Cosmocentric Model
of Pastoral Psychotherapy

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Bantu views illness as a disruption of cosmic harmony in the universe. This disruption is experienced between the living and the living dead, between Murungu and other beings in the universe. The symptoms of this cosmic disruption of harmony are manifested in loss of meaning and the purpose of life. Theologically speaking, the disruption of NTU is an alienation of the NTU from Murungu and other beings in the universe. A muntu, whose NTU has been disrupted, experiences and suffers alienation of self from Murungu and from other selves. The ruptured NTU of muntu brings to the muntu a feeling of estrangement from the eco-community. Wade W. Nobles, reflecting on this disruption from an African American experience in the United States, captures the Bantu notion of mental illness when he says:

The cause of this insanity is in fact a disruption in the natural harmonious relationship between the spiritual, material, conceptual, affective and connotative aspects of black psycho-social and geophysical reality.³⁵

The disruption of NTU in muntu weakens the muntu ontological capacity of beingness and becomingness. This ontological capacity is the one through which life is energized. The capacity of beingness and becomingness overcomes the feeling self-negation and self-alienation from

³⁵ Wade W. Nobles, African Psychology: Towards Its Reclamation, Reascension and Revitalization (Oakland: Black Family Institute, 1986), 93.

Murungu and other beings in the eco-community.

The process of healing of disrupted NTU begins by a restoration of the cosmic equilibrium. This is significant, because the Bantu view mental wellness as a restoration of cosmic equilibrium where beings are fully engaged in the process of beingness and becomingness. The restoration of NTU to its full integrated capacity is what constitutes mental wholeness for the Bantu people. This is possible because all beings contribute in enhancing and increasing the NTU of other beings in the eco-community. "Individual salvation was inconceivable among the Meru people" Mbogori says, "because salvation and well-being was communal."³⁶ Theologically speaking, wholeness, and salvation for the Bantu people, is a reconciled NTU to Murungu and to other beings in the eco-community. A muntu whose NTU has been reconciled to Murungu experiences the grace (utuqi) and peace (Ukiri) in the universe which eventually leads to wholeness (thiiria).

³⁶ Mbogori interview.

TABLE 5

Place of the Cosmocentric Model and Other Major Therapeutic Models

Therapeutic Models	Key Persons	Emphasis	Driving Force	Therapeutic Goal	World View	Defect of the Model
PSYCHOANALYTIC (Individual centered)	Sigmund Freud	Personal aspect of experiences. Analysis.	All human behavior is controlled by libido. Intrapsychic.	Maximum pleasure.	Cause and effect. (One way causation) Anthropocentric.	Hyper-individualistic. Social and Physical experience is lost. The world is external and accidental. Individual behavior is determined by libido. Dualistic. Deterministic. Reductionistic. Mechanistic. Pathogenetic. Lack of spirituality. Cosmic Experience is lost.
BEHAVIORISTIC (Social and Environment Centered)	B. F. Skinner	Social and physical aspects of experiences.	All human behavior is controlled by social and physical environment.	Study of social and physical environment is key to behavior modification.	Cause and effect. (One way causation) Anthropocentric.	Individualistic. Personal experience is lost. Deterministic. Reductionistic. Mechanistic. Dualistic. Egocentric. Lack of spirituality. Behavior is determined by social and physical environment. Cosmic experience is lost.
HUMANISTIC (Individual Centered)	C. Rogers	Self. Self-discovery.	Internal self.	Self-differentiation. Self-actualization Personal freedom. Self Uniqueness. Transcend the past developments. Self Mastery. Self discovery.	Cause and effect. (One way causation) Anthropocentric.	Individualistic. Egocentric. Anthropocentric. Dualistic. Competition. Success Syndrome. Deterministic. Reductionistic. Mechanistic. Lack of spirituality. Cosmic experience is lost.

Therapeutic Model.	Key Person(s)	Emphasis	Driving Force	Therapeutic Goal.	Worldview	Defects of the Model
Psychosynthesis	R. Assagioli	Spiritual aspect. of experience. Psychosynthesis. Integration. Harmony.	Spiritual energy. Will. Imagination.	Increased awareness and identification to spiritual transpersonal self.	Two way causation. Interpersonal. Anthropocentric.	Cosmic experience is lost.
Family System (Family centered)	S. Minuchin V. Satir P. Alto D. Jackson G. Bateson	Family aspects of experience.	Believes that the so called identified patient is not necessarily the sick person.	Family's well-being. Family homeostasis.	Circular interpersonal causation. Anthropocentric.	Cosmic experience is lost.
Gestalt Therapy	F. Perls	Gestalt aspects of experience.	Creativity.	To increase psychological aliveness.	Social and environmental causation. Anthro-environmental centered.	Cosmic experience is lost.
Feminist Therapies	R. D. Laing T. Szasz	Radical social change aspects of experience. Empowerment.	Spirituality. Interrelatedness. Interconnectedness.	Radical social change. Social liberation for wholeness. Integration.	Interpersonal causation. Connectedness. Anthropocentric.	Cosmic experience is lost. Extreme radical feminist encourages separation.
Growth Counseling (Spirit centered)	H. Clinebell	Ecological potentialization aspects of experience. Growth/spiritual centered.	Spirituality. E'lan. Creativity.	Ecological. Potentializing and integration.	Mutual causation. Eco-systemic centered.	Complete cosmic experience is lost.

Thera- peutic Model	Key Person	Emphasis	Driving Force	Thera- peutic Goal	Worldview	Defects
Cosmo- centric (ecolog- ical) Incarna- tional synthetic approach.	P. Mviti Rukungah	Inter-cosmic aspects of experience. Communal inter- dependent. Spirituality Cosmic harmony. Cosmo- synthesis.	Cosmic universal life force (WU). Spirit- uality. Creat- ivity.	Cosmic well- being. Cosmo- entricity Becoming. Cosmic equil- ibrium. Integration.	Mutual causation holistic. Eco-community Cosmo- centric.	

Appendix A

Questionnaire Used With Bantu African People of East Africa

On God

1. What names are used for God?
2. What is the Meanings of those names?
3. (a) How did the Idea of God arise?

(b) How did the world arise?
4. What stories does your community tell to describe God's activity in the world?

God and humanity, creation and well-being

5. How did humanity arise?
6. Does God love other created beings as he loves humanity?
7. Is there such a thing as the FALL. How is this expressed?
8. How is well-being understood among your people?

Humanity and community

9. Who is the primary focus among Merus--an individual or the community?
10. How do you understand your relation to the community?
11. What does the term MUNTU mean?

Community of the Living and the Living dead

11. Where do people go after death?
12. How do your people deal with the Living dead?

Community Healing and Therapy

13. What was the work of Muga in Meru tradition?
14. How do Meru people understand well-being and health?
15. How is mental illness conceived?

Appendix B
People Interviewed

The following is a list of persons interviewed by the author or who confirmed the findings of this study.

	<u>NAMES</u>	<u>AGE</u>	<u>DATES</u>
1.	Johana M'Mbogori		06-16-93
2.	Henry M'Murugu		06-20-93
3.	Jeremiah M'Ituerandu		06-14-93
4.	Naman M'Mwirichia		06-16-93
5.	David M'Munyua		06-14-93
6.	Rebecca Kithira	78	06-19-93
7.	Kainda M'Migwi	91	06-26-93
8.	Martha Karegi	76	06-26-93
9.	M'Imanja	107	06-23-93
10.	Johana M'Ituamwari	85	06-22-93
11.	M'Makathimo M'Itirithia	71	06-19-93
12.	Stanely M'Mugambi		06-21-93
13.	Martha Kaumeguru	75	07-01-93
14.	Grace M'Rukaria	78	06-09-93
15.	Salome Mwitiabi	95	

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